THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISSIONAL VISION IN A MIDWESTERN AMISH MENNONITE CONGREGATION

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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NOVEMBER 2001

UMI Number: 3030145

UMI Microform 3030145

Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISSIONAL VISION
IN A
MIDWESTERN AMISH MENNONITE CONGREGATION

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

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Date Received: November 13, 2001

Abstract

The Development of Missional Vision in a Midwestern Amish Mennonite Congregation
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Doctor of Ministry
2001
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This study examines the development of missionary vision within Pleasant View Church (PVC), a Beachy Amish Mennonite fellowship, and hopes to provide pertinent analysis to its ministry team as they seek to discern God's leading for the church. It argues that the separatist heritage of Plain Anabaptism exemplified by PVC represents a viable missionary ecclesiology for an increasingly postmodern context.

Most Plain Anabaptist groups have seen considerable growth in recent years, due partly to procreation rates and retention of youth. PVC was started in 1958 by seven Old Order Amish families and by 2001 had grown to over seventy families in two congregations. Many members have been active in a peculiar style of missions. Much growth at PVC comes from persons leaving the Old Order Amish. While many see value in retaining a Gospel-based lifestyle distinct from wider culture, some feel a need for distance from their Old Order background. There has been some recent turnover in membership. To some, the church functions as a "way station" for people leaving an

Amish lifestyle; most who leave, however, grew up at PVC. As growth continues, those who must lead may want to reflect on PVC's life and mission.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first outlines Biblical, historical and theological foundations for discerning the Plain Anabaptist tradition as a missionary Remnant heritage and examines Beachy Amish missions in the twentieth century. The second section explores the relationship between Plainness and mission in the Post-Christendom era by considering the decline of Western Christendom in modern times, the development and decline of modernity, the emergence of postmodernity as a missional context, and particularly the tension between separation and acculturation felt among many Anabaptist groups today. The third section provides an introduction to PVC's history and life and some consideration of missional influences within and outside the congregation. Although it is not the goal of this study to influence or direct the congregation, the fourth section gives some strategic considerations for PVC's ministers, including missional challenges facing the congregation, apparent priorities of the congregation, and some possibilities for future mission.

Theological Mentor: Greg Ogden, D. Min.

Words: 350

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If this paper is completed and accepted, and if it is useful to anyone, it will be by the mercy of God. Several persons have participated in its the research and evaluation to whom I owe considerable gratitude. Professor Wilbert Shenk was very gracious and generous to serve as my Final Project Advisor, reading and commenting on each chapter, in some cases multiple times. Dr. Shenk was extremely kind in continuing to work with me on the paper while on sabbatical in Indiana. Professor Glen Stassen read and critiqued the manuscript as well, and was very encouraging. Greg Ogden, the director of the Doctor of Ministry program, encouraged me to go ahead with this project when I was in doubt; the staff of the Doctor of Ministry office, especially Claudia Vega and Lisa Marie Muscate, have been more than kind and helpful at every turn.

The four ministers of the Pleasant View Church, Bishop Howard Kuhns, Willis Bontrager, Mervin Helmuth and Deacon Duane Kuhns, advised me in designing and carrying out this study of their congregation. Duane was especially helpful in redesigning the format of the last four chapters. The manuscript was reviewed chapter by chapter by these four ministers. In addition, several other members read the first six chapters. Their comments and encouragement were invaluable, and I pray that it may be of some value to them. The members at Pleasant View have been more than kind and patient with us, and have given my family and me an entirely new vision of the Christian life.

My wife, Dorothy, and my mother-in-law, Carolyn Treadway, did some proofreading for me; I wish I had asked them to do more. My father-in-law was also encouraging. He lent me his computer when my old XT was no longer up to the task, and my brother-in-law, Bill Patrick, provided invaluable tech support. My family, and especially my wife, has been very patient with me. This project has taken two years, completing a Doctor of Ministry program that took me a total of nine years, and has curtailed time that rightfully belongs to them. It is to Dorothy, through whom God has spoken to me so many times, that this paper is dedicated.

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PART FOUR: STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study is atypical for a Ministry Focus Paper. It is written by an atypical student in an atypical situation about an unusual subject and in an unusual context. I began my studies in the Doctor of Ministry program, as many do, as the professional pastor of a decent but struggling congregation, hoping that the program would give me the knowledge and skill to help my congregation grow and flourish. It was, and is, my understanding that the program was designed for such pastors. My situation was unusual in that I was serving my congregation on a part-time basis, an arrangement that they and I hoped would be temporary. As my studies progressed, I began to perceive that I could better serve my congregation not as an employee, but as a free minister after the older tradition of my denomination, the Church of the Brethren. In the free ministry, each congregation was led by a team of ministers called from within. Their job was, primarily, preaching and teaching. They were neither paid nor employed. They served, as did everyone in the church, for the love of God.[1] I attempted to lead my congregation in this

[1] In a way they embodied -- and continue to embody, as there are an increasing number of congregations in several Anabaptist denominations that function this way -- the style of ministry outlined by Greg Ogden, among others, who writes from a mainline Protestant perspective. Ogden notes that there is a great need of "radical transformation in the *self-perception* of every believer" from being passive recipients of professional ministry to "vital channels" through whom God works in ministry, and goes so far as to suggest a baptismal ordination to the ministry. See Ogden, The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 12, 24, 212 and passim. Baptismal ordination to general ministry has long been recognized in

direction and was not successful. This led to what might be termed a clear opportunity to minister as a layperson. The combination of my inability to meet the congregation's expectations, time constraints related to my secular job and my own spiritual failures led to the congregation's decision to relieve me of my duties in 1997. I was uncertain whether to continue in the program after this, and decided to do so after consulting with staff at Fuller.

My family and I have been participating in the life and worship of Pleasant View Church, a Beachy Amish congregation, since we left the Church of the Brethren, and this paper is a study of that congregation's missional vision. This is something of an unusual subject and context for a Ministry Focus Paper. Very little, if anything, has been written from the perspective of a Beachy Amish congregation, or any other Plain Anabaptist group,[2] on a Doctor of Ministry level. I am at Pleasant View as a learner, not a teacher. I have declined to speculate about any other role in this paper. I have also refused, from the proposal that preceded this study to the present, to propose or recommend strategies or programs. The purpose of this study has been to describe and analyze, not to prescribe or influence. Its objective is to provide information, not direction.

This study is divided into four parts. The first four chapters, which form the bulk of the paper, discuss bases for discerning

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Anabaptist circles.

[2] "Plain" is used in this paper interchangeably with "sectarian Anabaptist," and refers to those fellowships of the Amish, Mennonite, Hutterite, Old Brethren and similar traditions that continue to hold to a strong heritage of nonconformity and nonresistance.

the Plain church traditions as a missionary heritage. There is relatively little written on the missional understandings or activity of the Plain fellowships as a whole. They are not represented within theological academia, and some might consider theological academia to be superfluous. I suspect that there may be a tendency for the theological academy to forget they are there. The first three chapters outline the Biblical, historical and theological bases for understanding the true church as a missionary Remnant. Remnant theology so-called has been held in disdain by much of contemporary missiology,[3] but much of contemporary missiology appears to be predicated on the assumption of the Constantinian mass church, and is therefore not able to understand the nature of a Remnant body in which radical Christian discipleship is normative. These chapters attempt to articulate such a view of the church. They are followed by an account of Plain Church, particularly Beachy Amish, missionary activity in the present era.

The next section includes two chapters, which address the concept of Plain cultural nonconformity and missions in the post-Christendom era. The first discusses the eclipse of Christendom by an ascendant modernity, and the apparent present decline of modernity. Presenting the Gospel in postmodernity, it is proposed, may require a consistency of Christian life that both mainline and evangelical Protestantism have been unable to produce. The next discusses the experiences of Anabaptist groups in modern culture. In

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[3] See for example Donald McGavran, Understanding Church Growth 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1990), 121f.

comparison to other groups, mainline Anabaptists have only lately assimilated into popular Western culture, emerging into Christendom, modernity and the mainline Protestant world all at once, just as these are beginning to crumble. Plain Anabaptists are sometimes tempted in the same direction, but are experiencing rapid, sustained growth rather than decline.

The third section, consisting of two chapters, gives a fairly detailed account of the development and expression of, influences on, and challenges facing the Pleasant View congregation, as well as an overall introduction to the church. The internal influences of congregational life, home, school and work are discussed, as are the external influences of other Beachy Amish and similar Plain groups and ministries, other Mennonites and Evangelicals, and the context provided by the rural American Midwest and the Old Order Amish.

The final section contains two chapters which provide missional considerations for Pleasant View's leadership team. Some of the missional challenges facing Pleasant View are discussed, including their Old Order neighbors, other Mennonites, and outsiders, especially nonconformist seekers that filter in to the congregation. An attempt is made to distill and articulate the priorities of the congregation, and present a few possibilities for mission that the leadership may wish to consider.

This paper has several purposes. For the Pleasant View ministers, I hope that it will provide helpful information and analysis. It is my hope and prayer that it will serve a constructive purpose for them. I am confident of their leadership and ability,

more so than of my own analytical skills. Beyond Pleasant View, it may be that someone else will want to know more about the life and mission of the Plain churches. Perhaps it will provide encouragement to someone who is coming to the conclusion, as I did, that the myriad new ideas and programs for renewal he or she is studying are just tinkering around the edges of a failed, institutional faith. For myself, this paper has provided an opportunity for detailed, sober reflection on an alternative to that faith -- a chance to look hard before acting on a costly decision to leap into the world of Plain Anabaptist Christianity.

PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS FOR DISCERNING THE PLAIN CHURCH AS A MISSIONARY HERITAGE

CHAPTER 1

BIBLICAL BASES FOR DISCERNING THE REMNANT CHURCH

This paper proposes to study the missional vision of a sectarian Anabaptist [1] congregation: who do these people think they are, and what do they believe God is calling them to do? Asking questions such as these from a sectarian Anabaptist perspective requires an underlying understanding of the Church and her relationship with Christ that is somewhat different from what one usually finds in evangelical Protestantism. Much of Western Christianity today struggles with a decline of power, prestige and influence in its surrounding culture. The Plain people have never perceived the true church [2] as powerful, prestigious or especially influential in wider society. The true church is a visible entity, relatively uncaptivated by wider culture; it sees itself as a community apart, living within the

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[1] Sectarian Anabaptists, particularly the Amish, see themselves in some way as rightful heirs of the heritage described in the Martyr's Mirror, a large martyrology and doctrinal work edited and first published by Dutch Mennonite Thieleman Van Braght in 1660 and still read in many Plain homes. This paper uses the term "Anabaptist" to describe those traditions which have descended from and identified with the Anabaptist reformation of the sixteenth century, and not just the sixteenth-century movement itself. Sectarian Anabaptists are distinguished from mainline Anabaptists, who have more closely identified with modern culture, and from non-Anabaptist sectarians.

[2] The concept of the true church will be discussed at length below; "church" in the Anabaptist context refers primarily to visible congregations of believers. On balance, it is seen more as an organism than an institutional organization.

nations of the world but holding citizenship elsewhere. Within the church, that citizenship is expressed through an alternative, Gospel-based culture, a whole-life Christianity that seeks to bring every detail of life under the Lordship of Christ. It is a straight and narrow way that the wider culture, even under the pretense of "Christendom", has never deigned to travel. The true church rejoices to win people to this Way who have never been on it before but harbors no illusions that the culture will yield to Christ short of His return.

At times the true Church has grown large, and at times it has drifted off into oblivion, but throughout the history of Christianity there has always been a remnant, a core of faithful followers of Christ.[3] The Remnant is a holy nation and a royal priesthood, but nothing like a modern state or a medieval magisterium. Most of the time it has been relatively small, hence the language of assembly (*qahal, ecclesia*) or community (*koinonia*). It is the property of the kingdom of God and has never been fully amalgamated with any of the petty kingdoms of the world. It is the burden of this chapter to articulate its Biblical basis as a foundation for then considering its historical discernment and its theological description. Understanding the nature of the Remnant

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[3] The argument among most Plain groups follows that in 1660 of Thieleman Van Braght in The Bloody Theater, or, the Martyr's Mirror (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1886, 1950), 26-27, which argues for the historical existence, but not necessarily the particular succession, of Remnant groups.

church itself is necessary to a good understanding of its missionary purpose and its missional challenges in the present day.

The concept of the Remnant is firmly rooted in the Bible. God "followed the rule of having His people separated from the children of darkness commonly called `the world' from the time there was a difference between righteous and unrighteous."[4] While the Remnant is especially important in the Old Testament, the New Testament has its own line of Remnant thinking that goes beyond "Remnant" as a technical term. It is important to note that the simple Biblicism of sectarian groups throughout much of Christian history takes a "this is that" and "then is now" approach to the Scriptures,[5] which makes the Scriptures' own statements about the true people of God of utmost importance.

Old Testament

In secular usage, the Hebrew words translated as "remnant" have some variation in meaning. The two principal words, *she'ar* and *yether*, refer to a simple remainder or excess: no locusts remained in Egypt after God sent wind to remove them (Exod. 10:19); the heathen craftsman makes an idol of the excess of his firewood (Isa. 44:17,19). Other Hebrew words for "remnant" include *paliyt*, which refers to things or people escaping something (vegetation in Exod.

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[4] Daniel Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1928), 165.

[5] The phrases come from James McClendon, Doctrine (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 345. See also Lester Bauman, The Little Flock (Crockett, KY: Rod and Staff Publishers, 1999), 12.

10:5), and *sariyd*, which connotes flight and fright (war survivors in Num. 21:35).

As a theological concept, the Remnant refers to God's people who are preserved through judgment. From the time of Israel's desert sojourn, God promises severe judgment for her unfaithfulness, but allows a remnant to repent (Lev. 26:36-45). God promises to wipe out His people several times in prophecy. Amos declares that northern Israel's idolatrous people will have no place to hide from God's wrath (Amos 9:1-4). Jeremiah is told not to intercede for Judah, because they will be taken "out of my sight" as was Ephraim after refusing to repent (Jer. 7:13-16). Ezekiel promises that Jerusalem, which used God's blessings, gifts and temple for idolatry, adultery and human sacrifice, will be destroyed like Samaria (Ezek. 23). Yet always a small group of Israel survives, and with them a call to be faithful to God as their ancestors were not. This remnant becomes the seed of a new Israel, and it must learn that its survival depends on faithfulness to God. The judgment is successful only when "their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity" (Lev. 26:41). The surviving remnant "shall no more stay upon him that smote them but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Isa. 10:20-23). They will become "an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the LORD," and no longer be given to iniquity, lies or deceit (Zeph. 3:12-13). They will "loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed," and their "ways and doings" will be a comfort to their

repentant elders (Ezek. 6:8-10, 14:22-23). One can discern a cycle of judgment, growth and drift from Genesis through the historical books, but especially before and during the Babylonian Exile. In each stage of the cycle, God preserves for Himself a core, a Remnant of those who are faithful to Him.

Faithfulness is mandatory for the Remnant, not optional. God's people have no security apart from their obedience to Him.[6] It is the faithful who are "counted for seed," and the "true children of God are usually only a faithful few."[7] Noah and his family are preserved because Noah walks with God before the flood (Gen. 6-9). Elijah and the seven thousand who refuse to bow to Baal are preserved because they are faithful under persecution by Israel's own queen. Before the exile, the Rechabites are promised an everlasting line because they refuse to adopt Israel's increasingly worldly, pagan culture (Jer. 35). After the Exile, Daniel and his friends are preserved because they refuse to acknowledge any other God. (Dan. 1,3,6). The Remnant under judgment learns to accept the discipline of God and return to its Maker, to seek the welfare of the city where it is exiled (Jer. 29:7) while maintaining its distinct identity and to remember the promise of eventual, and eventually eschatological, restoration. It is a major burden of the

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[6] John Goldingay, Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1987), 75. For Goldingay the call to obedience comes on the basis of the fact that the Remnant has already been preserved (73).

[7] Stephen Yoder, My Beloved Israel (Goshen, IN: Pilgrim Publishers, 1987), 65-66.

prophets that the unfaithful also repent and join with the faithful Remnant. Judgment gives them this opportunity but is no guarantee of a change of heart. When Jeremiah invites the fugitives in Egypt to repent, he is rebuffed by claims that the exile happened because they neglected to worship the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 44:15-19). It takes time, often a very long time, for the survivors to realize that it is God who is true. Many never get there (Jer. 44:27-28), but those who do know that they have been preserved by the grace of God.

Modern Protestant Old Testament scholarship seems careful to point out that the Remnant is preserved by grace and not works. The consensus appears to be that "when a remnant survives judgment, however, it does not do so because of its righteousness; its salvation is of grace."[8] One scholar goes as far as to say (despite the fact that the Bible references he lists to make his point lead to the opposite conclusion when taken in context) that

> if the establishment of the remnant has its basis in the graciousness of God, the conversion of men cannot be the essential presupposition for the existence of a remnant. . . . the primary reference is always to the deliverance of the remnant with no condition or basis, and only then do we read of its conversion or faith.[9]

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[8] Goldingay, Theological Diversity, 73.

[9] Volkmar Herntrich, "Leimma, ktl." in G. Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol.IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967; Orig. published in Vienna, 1942), 206.

Others admit, regarding 1 Kings 19, that the remnant "consists of those who remained faithful: but their preservation had been decided even before the start of the coming troubles."[10] These assertions are partly true. It is certain that God's gracious action and not human virtue apart from Him preserves the Remnant. However, they reflect more on the bias of established Reformed Protestantism than on the Old Testament itself. The duality in the Old Testament is not between grace and Law, or grace and good works, but between God and idols (including the idol of human power). In the Old Testament, the Law is not the opposite of grace; it is a matter of grace to be chosen as the only people on earth who know God's Law. Obedience to the Law is not a matter of ritual manipulation of the supernatural but of a will subjected to the will of the Lord. The Lord is the only living God, not some idol or impersonal force. The point of judgment, and the point of the Remnant's preservation, is the oft-repeated "then you will know that I am the LORD." The Remnant is preserved by God's grace, a demonstration that the true seed of Israel continues. That grace is manifest in the repentance, obedience and faithfulness that mark the Remnant before, during and after judgment.

As a nation-state, Israel had requested and received the security of a stable monarchy with its trappings of power: an army, a temple, a king and a government. Throughout its national history

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[10] Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. II (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1965; Orig. published in Munich, 1960), 21.

God repeatedly demonstrated that the security of these things is transitory. There is a certain logic in the failure of institutions that leads to the formation of remnants. The kingship of God could not be expressed adequately in Israel as a theocratic nation.[11] The state was "somewhat of a borrowed garment" for Israel.[12] It was a *qahal* (an assembly) before it was a nation, and it became one again as the Jews were dispersed after the Exile and thousands of *minyans* [13] and synagogues gathered to observe God's sabbath around the world. Unfaithful Israel had become in her idolatry a microcosm of the worst of pagan worship. The faithful Remnant assembly was now to become a microcosm of what God calls the world to become: a holy people belonging to a holy God, subject to His holy Law. We do not know what happened to the unfaithful majority of Israel in exile. Without land or national identity, they probably melted into the cultures that conquered them. It was only through the Jewish Remnant assemblies that Israel would continue to exist, and their existence came to be defined by their unique relationship with Israel's God. The exiles would return, of course, at the leave of their Persian rulers, but Israel's day as a nation-state in its own right was now gone.[14]

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[11] Although this is the contention of Goldingay, Theological Diversity, 74.

[12] Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, vol. I (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962. Orig. published in Munich, 1957), 90.

[13] A Jewish term for the ten men necessary to form a congregation, taken from Gen. 18:32.

[14] It could be questioned whether modern Israel is either theocratic or a state in its own right, or how long it will continue to exist with its

Israel's nationhood effectively ended with the exile, but it is precisely because its national identity was gone that Israel could now be devoted to its mission as a light to the nations (Isa. 42:16, 49:6). Daniel is servant to heathen kings, but his wisdom and loyalty to God show them that they are but men subject to the true God of Heaven. Zechariah goes as far as to envision a time when the remnant of Israel's enemies will go to Jerusalem to worship God (Zech. 14:16 and Isa. 60). Surely Israel in exile dreamed of national restoration, but the restoration found in the prophets points beyond a political renewal to something of global, even eternal, proportions. It is not for the nation's sake, but "for mine holy name's sake" (Ezek. 36:21ff). In the new Israel, they will know that the Lord is God, and so will the nations. No one will have to teach his neighbor, because God says, "I will write my law on their hearts. . . they will all know me from the least to the greatest" (Jer. 31:31-34). It is the new Israel that will draw all nations to God (Isa. 60:3), and even if the promise is that they will come to Jerusalem for salvation, the Zion to which they come is one transformed, perhaps even transcending geographical limits. The purified Remnant, far from being stuck in one land, is to carry the knowledge of God to nations that do not know Him, before those nations return to worship at the new Zion, in a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 66:19-23).

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trust in military might; the topic here is the Israel of the Old Testament.

If the Remnant points to a new Israel and a new Zion, that Zion will be ruled by a new King: Immanuel, God-with-us, the Messiah.[15] Immanuel is mentioned in Isaiah 7 and 8 as a child to be born of a virgin. The immediate context has to do with invading Assyrian armies. Immanuel's identity is not clearly spelled out, although the land of Israel belongs to him (Isa. 8:8). The Remnant will turn to him as God's Messiah, and on him they will stay (Isa. 9:6, 10:21). He will be the holy child, the root of Jesse, and he will be "to us," to the Remnant (Isa. 8:6-18, 9:1-7, Micah 5:1ff) but also to the whole earth (Isa. 11:1-16) in the time of restoration. He will be a Davidic shepherd (Jer. 23:3-8, Ezek. 34:11-31, 37:24-25) who will rule justly. The Lord will sweep away the refuge of lies and sin and establish him as a new foundation of faithfulness (Isa. 28:16-17) in the repentant Remnant. As the Remnant has suffered some for its own sins, so the Messiah will suffer more for the sins of many (Isa. 52:13-53:12). Because of the Messiah and his everlasting covenant, unknown nations will come running to the new Israel (Isa. 55:3-5) that is even now present in the faithful Remnant of God's people.

The Old Testament, then, presents us with the purified Remnant as a sign of judgment on the sins of Israel, called to be repentant

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[15] In the King James Version the term "Messiah" is found only in Daniel 9:25-27, which refers to a future destruction of Jerusalem. The Hebrew root, usually translated as "anointed," is common in the Old Testament, developed along these lines especially in the Psalms (2:2, 18:50, 20:6, 132:10,17). In the New Testament "Messiah" (the Greek equivalent is "Christ") describes a common hope of the Jewish people. Most other translations do not use "Messiah" in the Old Testament.

and faithful. But it is also a sign of hope, and its existence points to a new Israel, a new Messiah, and even a new heaven and a new earth. Thus the Remnant is called to be a light to the nations, declaring the knowledge of God. After the Old Testament draws to a close, the Remnant finds expression in the synagogue, the congregation of Jews gathered in expectation of God's coming Messiah. The Remnant thus lays the framework or the church of the Messiah in the New Testament.

The Apocrypha

Although their German Bibles contained the books of the Apocrypha, the Anabaptists were never entirely comfortable with it. The Martyr's Mirror notes that one twelfth-century believer, Henry of Toulouse, was charged with rejecting the Apocrypha,[16] while the Waldensians accepted it but "as Jerome says. . . for the edification of the people, but not for the purposes of confirming church doctrines."[17] There are several references to Apocryphal books in the Martyr's Mirror. At least three refer to the example of the Maccabean mother who urged her seven sons to die rather than deny God's law (2 Mac. 7), and there are at least four references to the courage and prayerfulness of Judith. One Beachy Amish bishop found this perspective written on the face page of the Apocryphal section in his German Bible: "Good to read but not to preach from."[18] That

[16] Martyr's Mirror, 274.

[17] ibid., 284.

[18] Stephen Yoder, My Beloved Brethren (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Press, 1992), 323.

represents well the Plain Anabaptist take on these intertestamental writings.

The Remnant is found in a few places in the Apocrypha. As the earth has much clay but little gold, so only a few will be saved (2 Esdr. 8:2-3). Tobit is an example of right worship and separation in the face of apostasy (Tob. 1:3-11). Baruch invites the exiles to repentance from idolatry (Bar. 4:5ff) and the letter of Jeremiah exhorts them to remain pure (Bar. 6:4ff). Eleazar the scribe and the Maccabean mother in front of Antiochus are moving examples for a faithful, suffering Remnant (2 Mac. 6,7). Under the revolt and leadership of Mattathias and Judas Maccabeus and their successors, Israel enjoys a brief period of national revival. This is sustained by international intrigue and alliances with heathen empires (especially the early Roman empire, 1 Mac. 8:17-32), and results in considerably less than the Messianic restoration envisioned in the Old Testament.

The New Testament

The Old Testament covers the story of God's chosen people for thousands of years; the New covers less than a hundred. "Remnant" as a theological term is found only twice in the New Testament, both times in Romans.[19] The concept of the Remnant as the faithful People of God is carried over from the Old Testament, however, and to a certain extent underlies the entirety of its teaching. The

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[19] In the King James Version "remnant" is used four additional times to translate the secular word *loipoi* (remainder).

whole of the New Testament is addressed to, and from, the assemblies of Christians known as the church, the *ecclesia* of called-out believers gathered in Jesus' name. In Matthew, Jesus gives some detail about group authority (Matt. 16:17-19 and parallels; 18:15ff; 28:16-20). Mark tells of the angel's command to the group of disciples that continues after Jesus' resurrection (Mark 16:7). Luke, written to a specific person, presupposes that those things believed "among us" were taught to him in some context (Luke 1:1,14). John is written that "ye" might believe and have life in Christ (John 20:31). Acts tells of the spread of the Gospel across the world by the witnessing community (Acts 1:8). The epistles of Paul are consistently addressed to the "saints" (*hagiois* - Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:2), to the "church" (*ecclesia* - 1 Cor. 1:2, 2 Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, 1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:1, Philem. 1:2 - he refers to Philemon as "fellow-laborer"), or, in familial terms, to a "son" (*tekno* - commonly translated as "child" - 1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 1:2, Tit. 1:4). The "saints" are those who are set apart for God through Christ. The "church" refers to those who have been called out from the world, the assembly of believers in Christ. While there has been much discussion through the centuries about the "local" and "universal" church, "such a distinction is impossible for Paul. . . he does not make the differentiation which later came into use."[20] The Greek

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[20] K.L. Schmidt,"Ekklesia," in G. Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965 - orig. published in Stuttgart, date unk.), 507.

word comes from *ek-* ("out of") and *kalein* ("to call") and refers, as does the Hebrew *qahal*, to a gathered assembly. This is Paul's meaning, and reading universal or invisible meanings into it is probably unwise.[21] Timothy and Titus are addressed affectionately as children, perhaps indicating the depth of their closeness to their own pastoral mentor. Hebrews is not specifically addressed to an identifiable group but notes that God has spoken "to us" as to old Israel by the prophets (Heb. 1:1-2) and expresses some concern for congregational order (13:17). James is addressed to the dispersion of the twelve tribes (James 1:1) and gives detailed instructions on congregational life (James 2:1-6, 3:1-12, 4:1-4, 11-17, 5:9,13-20). Peter's first epistle is addressed to the elect strangers (1 Pet. 1:1-2, cf. 2:9,11, Heb. 11:13) of Asia Minor, and his second is addressed to those of "like precious faith" (2 Pet. 1:1). John writes "unto you" (plural) "that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4), and in 2 and 3 John deals with specific threats to a true and holy church. Jude writes to "them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:1). Revelation is addressed to the servants of God, and especially to the churches of Asia (Rev. 1:1,4). Thus each book of the New Testament is written to believers and churches of believers in Christ -- disciples who have come out from the world, either from old unfaithful Israel or from pagan Gentile society, to form a new

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[21] Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 46.

community known as the Church of God. This new community is parallel to the true seed of Israel in the Old Testament, and is the promised fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34).

The connection between the church and the prophetic Remnant is found in Romans 9-11. In Romans 9:27, Paul quotes Isaiah (Isa. 10:22-23), noting that in God's judgment on Israel only a *hypoleimma*, a remnant, is saved,[22] a seed-like Remnant that is Israel's only hope in the face of Sodom-like destruction (Rom. 9:29, quoting Isa. 1:9 LXX). This promise is placed along that given in Hosea (Hos.2:23 [2:25 and 2:12 LXX]) that those who are "not my people" -- by which Paul means the Gentiles -- will be called "the children of the living God" (Rom. 9:25-26). Old Israel could not obtain the righteousness they sought by works of the Law, but the Christian Gentiles have obtained this righteousness by faith (Rom. 9:30). This idea is developed further in Romans 10:1-18. Faith "unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:8-10) is now for "whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord" (Rom. 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32 [3:5 LXX]), through the Gospel message the Christians proclaim (Rom. 10:5,14). Israel is provoked, but not totally cast off (Rom. 10:19 - 11:6), for there remains to this day a *leimma*, a remnant according to the election of grace and not of works. Paul cautions Gentile believers not to vaunt their new status: it is the Jews who naturally belong to the Root, and they can (and hopefully will)[23] be restored. Each

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[22] Manuscript evidence for *hypoleimma* is about the same as for the reading *kataleimma*, found in the *Textus Receptus* on which the King James Version is based. They mean the same thing.

Gentile believer must "continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22). The Gentile believers have been grafted on to the Remnant of Israel; they must continue in the righteousness of faith.

The Remnant is chosen by God's act of grace, and not by its own merit. As earlier noted the duality that led to the Remnant's creation in the Old Testament was not between grace and works, but between God and idols; the true Remnant consisted of those who worshipped God alone. Here, there is a duality between grace and works, between human attempts at righteousness and the righteousness of faith. Works here are works of legalistic, nationalistic or ceremonial purity, such as circumcision. The true work of God, as Christ himself puts it, is to believe on the One He has sent (John 6:29). But it is at the point of believing that Anabaptist interpretation of the Bible parts ways with the established Protestant line. Believing, or faith (they are the verb and noun forms of the same Greek root), seems to be the concept on which a theology of salvation hinges. The tendency in Protestantism is to equate faith with consent to right doctrine, especially about salvation.[24] Right doctrine is indispensable, but the grace by which we are saved is "through faith"; it is "the gift of God"

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[23] Taken out of context this is sometimes used to suggest that the Jews do not need Jesus for salvation, but one Beachy Amish bishop notes that this is "unrealistic, unfair, deceptive and entirely unscriptural." S. Yoder, My Beloved Israel, 68

[24] This is a caricature, but it is a logical extension of defining faith in such a way that it can be accepted by a national church.

given "lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). Faith is not merely assent, but a yielding trust in which the will is submitted to the will of God. The Christian "with the heart believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10), yielding to the grace of God. Mere intellectual consent cannot do that. Catholics were justly accused of synergism, of believing that salvation was a result of combined divine and human effort, because of their belief in the requirement of sacerdotal acts of piety. Anabaptists have been accused of synergism, too, but they understand faith and salvation as relational concepts rather than simply legal ones. It could be argued that, in their simple Biblicism, the Anabaptists thus recovered something of the Hebraic understanding of wholistic faith that undergirds the New Testament rather than relying on a Greek dualism, common to the Catholic and Protestant heirs of medieval scholasticism, that separates faith from action. Relational faith drives obedience, the necessary consequence of grace (James 2:17-26). God's remnant Church is saved by grace through actual faith, *fiducia* and not mere *assensus*.[25]

It is this faith that is required for being part of the Church, indeed, for being a genuine Christian at all. This faith necessarily drives the believer to repentance, conversion, and

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[25] W.R. Estep, The Anabaptist Story (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963, 1975), 146.

obedience. Early Anabaptists tied faith to the new birth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, and to repentance and amendment of life.[26] New Testament churches live as "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29) by faith. They are people apart in the world, distinct from the nations and yet living among and gathering converts from them (1 Pet. 2:9-12). They are saints, churches, children of God, clinging to, defined by, and often commended for their faith in Christ (Luke 1:1, Rom. 1:8, Eph. 1:1, Phil. 1:25-28, Col. 1:2, 1 Thess. 1:3, 2 Thess. 1:3-4, James 1:2-3, 1 Pet. 1:5, 2 Pet. 1:1, 1 John 5:4, Jude 1:3,20, Rev. 2:13, 19, 13:10, 14:12). Far from being a cold, legal, mental exercise or assumption, faith is the yielded trust in God by which Christians are incorporated into the assembled Body of Christ.

The Anabaptists recovered this notion of the church as an assembly of genuine believers. The magisterial Protestant churches, as the Roman Catholics before them, assumed that church membership was essentially equivalent to citizenship within the "Christian" state, and this assumption colored their entire theological system.[27] It had not been so in the New Testament. New Testament Christianity [28] taught believers to respect and honor their rulers,

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[26] Schleitheim Confession (1527) art. I and Dordrecht Confession (1632) arts. VI, VII, XVI and XVII.

[27] R. Clapp, in A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 29-30, and passim, notes that "the Constaninian settlement demanded that the Christian faith be privatized and individualized."

[28] By "New Testament Church" or "New Testament Christianity" is meant the Church and its life as articulated in the New Testament; it would be

to pay taxes, to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-4), but not to go to law before secular authorities (1 Cor. 6:1-8), nor participate in idolatry (Act 15:29, 1 Cor. 10:19-33), nor love the things of the world (1 John 2:15), nor become entangled with the world's affairs (2 Tim. 2:4). They were instead to love their enemies (Matt. 5:38-48, Rom. 12:18-21), take up the cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24-28 and parallels), refuse oaths (Matt. 5:33-37, James 5:12), refuse to fight with physical weapons (John 18:36, Eph. 6:12ff, 2 Cor. 10:4-5), recognize state rulers as permitted outside the perfection of Christ (John 19:11, 2 Thess. 1:6-10), and especially recognize that their citizenship was now in heaven where Christ rules (Eph. 2:19, Phil. 3:20, Heb. 13:14, Matt. 17:24-27). The Catholics tended to apply these "counsels of perfection" to their monastic orders, while the Protestants placed them in the sphere of private life; but most Anabaptists have held that they were clear teachings required of all believing Christians, necessarily excluding the idea of the "Christian" state. The teaching of a "Christian" state is not found in the New Testament, although there may be a hint at a pseudo-Christian government in Revelation (Rev. 12-13, 17). Anabaptists could point out that the passages about the Whore of Babylon used against the Roman Catholics could also be used against persecuting Protestants.[29]

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ludicrous to expect Christians to emulate the sins and failures of early congregations, although their repentance when confronted with sin (as in Corinth) can be instructive.

[29] Indeed, it could be argued that Protestantism formed the foundation of a nationalism accountable to no religious authority save its own

The New Testament Church exercises discipline in the lives of its members (1 Cor. 5, 2 Cor. 2, for example), but leaves the sword to others. It is ruled by Jesus Christ as Lord. Caesar, whatever form he may take, may exercise political power for a few decades if he can survive the political intrigue. Magistrates and proconsuls come and go. These are but petty kings, ultimately subject to Christ, to whom the Church has most intimate access. They are to be obeyed as far as is consistent with the commands of Christ, but no further. In the end, they will all be brought to nothing, and Christ himself will reign.

The basic conception of the church as the gathering of believers ruled by Christ, then, underlies the whole of the New Testament, because it is to the church so defined that the New Testament is addressed. This concept of the church is articulated in a variety of ways. In relation to Christ, the church is the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, and the bride of Christ.[30] As Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:12-31, Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:18ff) the church grows and works together, looking to Christ as its ruling Head (Eph. 4:4-16, Col. 1:18). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, it remains separate from the world and its gods, consecrated to its Lord, built

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perceived interest. See W. McGrath, Conservative Anabaptist Theology (Culpepper, VA: Christian Printing Mission, 1994), 45.

[30] D. Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible, 321 and cf. Dordrecht Confession art. VIII.

on a solid foundation of apostles and prophets with Christ as chief cornerstone (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Eph. 2:19-22). The temple concept is expanded to the priesthood of believers, so that Christians are royal priests and living stones (1 Pet. 2:4-10, Rev. 1:5-6). As Christ's bride, the Church awaits the consummation of its relationship with him at his return (Matt. 25:1-11, Eph. 5:22-33, Rev. 21:9). The church is also described as a household (Heb. 3:5-6, 1 Tim. 3:15) over which Christ presides, parallel to the Christian home,[31] and as a house which is built on a solid foundation (Matt. 7:25, 16:18 and parallels).

In relation to Israel, the church is heir to the Old Testament covenants and promises (Eph. 2:11ff, Matt. 21:42-45). In relation to the world, the church is a holy and separate people (Rom. 12:1-2, Gal. 1:2-5) giving the light of salvation in Christ to a perverse world (Matt. 5:14-16, Phil. 2:14-16, 1 Pet. 2:9-12). Without separation, the church cannot give its light (Eph. 5:1-14).[32] The church is separate from the world as a worshipping community (refusing to participate in the worship of idols in whatever form), a moral community (refusing to accept the world's varying definitions of right and wrong) and a transnational community (refusing to grant absolute allegiance to any governmental regime).[33] Separation is felt especially, and sometimes painfully,

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[31] L. Gingerich, The Church: A Theocracy (Goshen, IN: Pilgrim Publishers, 1987), 9.

[32] Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible, 503, notes that a rescuer can save a drowning person best when not entangled with him.

in relation to Caesar. When the church is in actuality a distinct people, and is willing to proclaim Caesar's limits before God, persecution often ensues, even when this proclamation is tempered with the teaching that Caesar is provided by God to maintain order for good. The church does not fear Caesar's judgment compared to the judgment of God. Caesar may destroy the body but has no authority over the soul (Matt. 10:28). The church anticipates its reunion with and judgment by Christ, knowing full well that it is Christ to whom it is presently and ultimately accountable.

The New Testament church, then, is a living, holy, separated, witnessing brotherhood. The "New Testament teaches that a true church comes out from among apostate religious groups, comes out from the world, and is consistently on guard to purge out the evil that would arise within."[34] It is a living theocracy ruled even in the present by the Holy Spirit, who lives and works among penitent, yielded believers. It is marked by its requirement of genuine faith for admission, by preventive and corrective discipline among its members, and by its witness to the world.[35] It is not yet perfect, of course. There are tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30) and wolves disguised among the sheep (Matt. 7:15-23). Sometimes the wolves must be expunged by separation and even shunning, and

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[33] W. McGrath, Separation Throughout Church History (Carbon Hill, OH: by the author, 1965), 13-17.

[34] Ibid., 12.

[35] See L. Gingerich, The Church: A Theocracy, 15-37.

sometimes the tares must be left to grow. But the church is still a wheat field and not a wild meadow, a sheep flock and not a wolf pack. Ultimately, it seeks conformity to Christ in every area of life, and recognizes Him as its living Lord and King.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BASES FOR DISCERNING THE REMNANT CHURCH

When Jesus told Simon bar Jonas on his confession of faith that "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," he attached a crucial promise: "And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The church of Jesus is the gathering of those called by and faithful to him. It has continued to this day, and will continue until Jesus returns. Magisterial churches see this continuation largely in terms of a particular, institutional succession: a true pastor was ordained by someone who was ordained by someone who comes from a long line of ordinations extending back to the apostle Peter (or, among the Eastern Orthodox, one of the other apostles). Even in many Protestant churches, where this doctrine is de-emphasized, it is not totally rejected. Anabaptist groups, on the other hand, have tended to hold to the concept of a general succession of the apostolic faith and teaching:

> By the general [it] is understood that succession . . . of true teachers, whether few or many, who have rightly taught the truth, and propagated it according to the best of their ability. . . . Here the words of Tertullian are applicable. He says, "the Christian church is called apostolic not just because of the succession of persons, but on account of the kinship of doctrine, since she holds the doc-

> trine of the apostles." This doctrine, everyone who boasts of the true succession, must prove from the true apostolic writings, as the means by which the church was originally instituted, subsequently established, and maintained through all times (we speak of the Christian and evangelical church).[1]

The Growth, Conflict and Fall of the Church to the Council of Nicea in 325

In the book of Acts and the early history of the church we find a record of tremendous growth, as Christian fellowships were established across the known world. We also find warnings and evidence of conflict in the New Testament. Conflict between believers could be resolved (Acts 15:1-41, Col. 4:10, Philem. 1:24, 1 Cor. 1:10-17; Matt. 5:21-26, 7:1-5, 18:15-35, 20:20-28 and parallels), but when conflict arose because members rejected the faith or because false teachers crept in under a pretense of faith, the church was in grave danger of Satanic corruption (Matt. 7:13-27, 18:7-9; Acts 20:28-30; Gal. 1:6-8 etc., Phil. 3:2-3, 18-19, Col. 2:18-23, 2 Thess. 2:3-12, 1 Tim. 1:3-7, 4:1-3, 2 Tim. 2:16, 3:13, Tit. 3:9-11, Heb. 3:12, 13:9, James 1:6-8, 2 Pet. 2:1-3:18, 1 John 2:18-29, 4:1-5, 2 John 1:7-11, 3 John 1:9-11, Jude 1:4-19, Rev. 2:4-5, 9, 14-16, 20-25, 3:2-3, 4, 9, 16:13-15, 20:10). The danger was ominous (hence the volume of references) and the consequences of departing from the faith were severe (Heb. 6:4-9, 10:26-31, 2 Pet. 2:20-22). Paul went as far as referring twice to a "falling away" from the faith prior to Christ's return (2 Thess. 2:3f, 1 Tim.

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[1] Martyr's Mirror, 26-27.

4:1ff). If one does not assume the legitimacy of particular succession in discerning the true church, this falling away has not been difficult to see.

The church of the first three centuries was plagued by heresy, as Christians had to define their beliefs in increasingly complex contexts. Even in Apostolic times, there were Christians who were tempted to follow the path of Judaizers, who taught the traditions of old Israel, or of Gnostics and Docetics, who attempted to mix Christian or pseudo-Christian teachings with their own brand of Greek philosophy. The canonical New Testament writings were defined finally in the fourth century,[2] and some epistles and writings circulating among the churches were not of definite apostolic origin. A number of these were relatively orthodox, like the Shepherd of Hermas or the Epistle of Barnabas. Others, such as the so-called Gospel of Thomas and Gospel of Peter were of Gnostic origin. Some groups forbade marriage and eating meat, while others rejected the God of the Old Testament. The churches had to counter teachings like these, and while the New Testament gave instructions for this (Rom. 16:17, Gal. 1:8-9, Tit. 3:10, 2 John 1:10-11), the impetus became defining doctrine precisely and excluding heretics by definition. Gradually, this intellectual activity "began to take the place of

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[2] J. Kennedy, The Torch of the Testimony (Sargent, GA: Christian Books Publishing House, 1963), 72, notes that the New Testament books were officially "canonized" because they had earlier been recognized by the churches as Scripture, not the other way around.

devotion to Christ, and Christianity more and more came to be a matter of understanding, of assent to certain truths, rather than dedication and love to the Lord."[3]

While the church became successful at defining itself against the heretics, it began to fail in defining itself in distinction to the world. Christians began to drift into such areas as the government and military. Persecutions became less frequent and less severe, so that when persecution arose in 249 after thirty years of peace, there was mass apostasy.[4] Many writers of the second and third centuries protested vigorously this worldward trend. Some, like Cyprian, supported the emerging Catholic church. Some, like Origen and Clement of Alexandria, remained within the Catholic Church, but were never canonized as saints. Others rejected the Catholic church and joined or formed separate fellowships. At issue for one, Novatian (ca. 260), was drift and, especially, the readmission of members who had rejected Christ under persecution. His followers may have continued into the sixth century. Another group, the Donatists, separated from the Catholic church some fifty years later over similar concerns. Tertullian (ca. 150-220) strove against drift and for a pure church founded on apostolic faith.[5] While much in the writings of these men, such as the idea of baptism or the mass producing salvation, is not acceptable in light of the New

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[3] Ibid., 71.

[4] W. McGrath, Separation Throughout Church History, 34.

[5] Clifton Yoder and Ray Horst, eds., The Church Triumphant (Lynchburg, TN: Moore County Mennonite Brotherhood, 1980), 13-17.

Testament, they represent an attempt to reestablish the concept of the true Church as the pure Bride of Christ.

It is worth noting that the history of nonconformist groups such as these is far from clear. History tends to be written by the "winners" of a conflict, and often what record remains of the "losers" is what their enemies said of them or chose not to destroy. Tertullian, for example, is said to have joined the Montanists, which supposedly held to celibacy, fasting, abstinence from meat, and the belief that Christ would soon establish the New Jerusalem at Phrygia. Much of Tertullian's writing squares well with New Testament teachings. He is quoted at length in the Martyr's Mirror, and a few modern authors question his faith in the Montanists' stranger teachings.[6] An example of long-standing false witness in history is that of Priscillian, a fourth-century bishop who taught the priesthood of all believers and accepted the Word of God as sole rule in doctrine and life. He was accused of Manichaeism, sorcery and immorality, and was beheaded with six of his followers. At the time of the Martyr's Mirror he was still thought a heretic.[7] The movement bearing his name lasted about two centuries, and the "official" record of his beliefs stood until the discovery, in 1886, of some of his own writings.[8] Some of those condemned in history as

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[6] J. Kennedy, The Torch of the Testimony, 85; see also L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 30, and W. McGrath, Separation Throughout Church History, 20.

[7] Martyr's Mirror, 357.

[8] J. Kennedy, The Torch of the Testimony, 64-65, 103-105; L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 45-46. The charge of Manichaeism was frequently leveled by the Roman church against its opponents. Mani (216-276) was a Gnostic who sought to unite Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Attractive to

heretics were heretics, and some simply challenged the pretended authority of an increasingly false church; it is sometimes difficult to say with certainty which is which.

Anabaptists generally place the great fall of the Church, the time at which what was once called the Bride of Christ became the Whore of Babylon, with the reign of Constantine. Constantine was one of four generals vying for control of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century. In 312 he had a vision of a cross in the sky and a dream in which he was told to mark his soldiers' shields with the letters *chi* and *rho*, the first two Greek letters in the word "Christ", as a sign that he was favored by the Christians' God. He won the battle before him, and the war, and became sole emperor in 324. Christianity was already tolerated -- the emperor Galerius had rescinded the edicts of persecution in 311 -- but now it became aligned with the Roman state. Constantine did not actually convert until near death, but a peaceable, united Catholic church was in his interest. When Arian schism threatened the unity of the church,[9] it was Constantine who called the Council of Nicea to resolve the matter. The Council may have come to Biblical conclusions, but the fact that Constantine called it demonstrated an unholy alliance that eventually led to a "prevailing assumption, from the time of

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philosophers, such as Augustine and Priscillian before his conversion, his universalist impulse survives in Western culture today. Mani was crucified in Persia, and his followers severely persecuted.

[9] Arius was a heretical Alexandrian bishop, deposed in 321, who taught that Christ was a created being and not God.

Constantine until yesterday, that the fundamental responsibility of the church for society is to manage it."[10]

The alliance between church and empire came to be known as Christendom, and its effect on both church and empire was profound. At the beginning of the fourth century, perhaps 10% of the Roman Empire's population had joined this barely legal sect. By the middle of the fourth century, that number had risen to about half, and by the end of that century Christianity became the Empire's official religion.[11] On one hand, this represented a missionary triumph: the idolatry of Rome had fallen before the throne of Christ. On the other, the church "fell prey to a radically realized eschatology," supposing this new condition to be a link between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God, eventually losing its ability to distinguish itself from the culture it now inherited, and thus rendering "to Caesar what belonged to God."[12] Its theology and ethical reflection that had previously sought to build a community based on the Bible and the teachings of the apostles subtly changed its focus to sponsoring and even ruling a great empire. The question concerning Caesar was no longer "How can we survive and remain faithful Christians under Caesar?" but "How can we adjust the

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[10] John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus: Vincit Agnus Noster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 188. Yoder's seminal critique of the Constantinianism of modern America profoundly influenced at least two generations of seminarians and scholars.

[11] See Barry Harvey, Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 67-68.

[12] Ibid., 72-73.

Church's expectations so that Caesar can consider himself a faithful Christian?"[13] The question was not vacuous, as Caesar was showing a desire to be taught the way of Christ and wanted the Church to teach him. The exchange hopefully changed Caesar for the better, but it changed the Church more.

When the church began to assume the task of sponsoring or managing the Empire, it began to lose its ability to function as the separated people of God. Helping Caesar manage his subjects eventually precluded living out an ethic of obedience to Christ that confessed that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord. The transformation did not take place overnight, but its effect was clear. Before the fourth century, Christian writers had overwhelmingly opposed participation in war and government, or in the fashions and amusements of the world. The Christian church was to be a people apart. Some "Christian" people had become involved in all of these things, however, and by the early fifth century the Church began to join hands with the state in persecuting those who held the old views. Before, the church had consisted primarily of Christians who had at least some understanding of their faith. Afterward, whole cities became "Christian" with at most a minimal understanding of, and often no devotion to, Christ. There would now be "Christian" towns and lands with "Christian" priests taking over a religious government parallel to the imperial one. They would eventually be part of a "Christian"

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[13] Rodney Clapp, A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian World, 26.

empire, fight in "Christian" wars, and adopt "Christian" traditions strangely like those of their pagan predecessors. The transformation "brought to perfection an instrument that Satan has ever since used against Christianity -- the 'nominal Christian'."[14]

Non-conformist Christian Groups from the Fourth through the Fifteenth Centuries

Throughout the next twelve centuries, small groups of remnant Christian believers arose to face persecution and extermination. Some sought a return to the New Testament, others a return to practices of some earlier era. In each case they called into judgment some aspect of the great apostasy of the established Church. The Priscillians emerged fourth-century Spain and lasted about two hundred years. In 428, Nestorius became bishop of Constantinople. He opposed the worship of Mary, emphasized the humanity of Christ, and was convicted of teaching that Christ was actually two persons at the Council of Ephesus in 431. He was banished to the Egyptian desert. His followers retained much of the false teaching that had crept into the Catholic church at that time, but spread into Arabia, central Asia, China and India, and have continued to modern times. In the seventh century, a loosely organized movement emerged in Mesopotamia that gave special heed to the writings of Paul, possibly rejected infant baptism and image worship, and emphasized holiness of life. These "Paulicians" spread into Armenia, Persia, and Europe, making converts especially in Bosnia and Asia Minor. They were persecuted with vigor, supposedly losing a hundred thousand martyrs in

[14] L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 36.

five years under the Byzantine empress Theodora in the ninth century.[15] Most of the Paulicians in the East were absorbed by the Muslims, with whom they allied themselves against their persecutors. Those in the West became known as "Bogomils," and continued to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the twelfth century, a movement emerged in Italy and France that rejected the Roman system and its traditions, opposed infant baptism, and advocated an ascetic life. Members were charged with heresy, but the truth of this charge is uncertain. They were given the name *Cathari* (pure ones), a name used as an epithet against groups dating back to the Novatians. Known also as "Albigensians," they were subject to a military crusade by Pope Innocent III in 1209, in which thousands (including some loyal Catholics) were slaughtered. Innocent III also authorized the Inquisition, which brought terror to heretics, nonconformists and Catholics for centuries to come.

Perhaps the most influential medieval remnant group for Anabaptists and Protestants was the Waldensians, who took their name from the itinerant preaching ministry of Peter Waldo of Lyons, France, in the twelfth century. The Waldensians found in the Scriptures a "complete rule of daily life and church order."[16] Waldo and his followers had been refused permission to preach their simple Gospel by Pope Alexander III in 1179 because they were unlearned laymen, not because they were heretics. They preached

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[15] J. Kennedy, The Torch of the Testimony, 114 and Yoder and Horst, The Church Triumphant, 27.

[16] Kennedy, 119.

anyway, and were persecuted severely. The Martyr's Mirror devotes at least sixty-five pages to their history and beliefs. They exist today, having merged with the Methodists in modern times.

Many other groups also sought faithfulness to the New Testament during this period. Some tried to do so within the Roman system. From the early centuries of Christianity some devout believers elected to withdraw from the world as hermits and monks. From Antony of Egypt (d. 356) to Benedict (ca. 520) to Francis (ca. 1210) and Dominic (1215), men and women sought to live a life of contemplation, prayer, worship and witness. Their devotion was admirable in many ways, but in order to exist in peace they still had to be loyal to the Catholic system, and were often used as tools of Roman intrigue, even in the Inquisition.[17]

With the Renaissance interest in classical documents and the invention of the printing press, pressure for a Biblical faith increased. John Wycliffe was charged with heresy in 1377 for rejecting the Pope in favor of the Bible and England's King Edward III, and Jan Huss was convicted in 1414 and burned at the stake the next year for adherence to Wycliffe's teachings. Both men mixed the faith of the Bible with nationalistic fervor. They were able to break from Rome, but not from the Constantinian synthesis of church and state. This was to plague the Reformation churches until the present time.

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[17] Even St. Francis' Testament, 31-33, hints at this. See Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 156.

The Reformation Era to the Present

The seeds of the Protestant Reformation had sprouted and were blooming by the time Martin Luther posted his theses in 1517. Popular opinion had turned against the Catholic Church, and now princes and kings chafed against the imperial hand of the Roman popes. Luther was an Augustinian monk and, while he felt it necessary to put out of the church's worship things that seemed contrary to Scripture (like papal authority), he was still devoted to the medieval Catholic concept of the state church, which Augustine had helped to formulate. His vision, apparently, was to reform the existing institutional church while retaining its basic structure. His contemporary in Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich, went farther. He wanted to practice only what was set down in Scripture, to reconstruct the existing system, reforming its structure along Biblical lines. Luther had kept vestments, images, episcopal control and the mass. Zwingli rid the church of these things, but still allied the church with the local cantonal government. Some Anabaptists hold that "Zwingli laid the groundwork for the real reformation,"[18] but did not put it into effect because of his loyalty to the civil powers. In both cases, whether a state church was controlled from Rome or Zurich, it was still part of the Constantinian system and would still tend to persecute anyone who dared to point out that such a system was contrary to the Bible. Whether the beast

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[18] L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 68.

on which the harlot sits was the Roman Empire or the local city council, the harlot church would still ride where the beast wanted to go.

The concept of the church as under civil authority may have contributed to the idea of the "invisible" church, which consists of all the truly elect and faithful, but finds no expression on earth. Such an "invisible church" concept allows those with qualms about corruption in high places, the sword, or non-Christian conduct tolerated by the culture, to comfort themselves with a privatized sincerity while maintaining the status quo. It is not taught in the Bible but is a necessary corollary to even a Bible-honoring attempt at establishing a state church in which actual faith is not required for membership. It was against this root that the Anabaptist movement struck.

Anabaptism in the sixteenth century was a movement with many roots and a number of branches. Most people claiming to be Anabaptists today would claim the heritage of, although not necessarily an historical connection to, the group of Zwingli's students that broke from him to reestablish a New Testament church on January 21, 1525. This fellowship would be marked by believers' baptism on confession of faith, separation from the world, and literal adherence to the teaching of the New Testament. On Saint Andrew's Day that year, the city council outlawed their beliefs.[19] Attempts

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[19] Martyr's Mirror, 414. Ironically, Zwingli's Zurich still used Saints' days.

at reconciliation on Zwinglian terms failed, although some Anabaptist leaders such as Hans Denck and David Joris eventually opted for silence and state-church toleration. On January 5, 1527, one leader, Felix Mantz, was drowned and another, George Blaurock, was beaten. Hundreds of martyrdoms quickly followed across Switzerland, Germany and Austria. The movement was spreading rapidly, and it was necessary to articulate its New Testament beliefs for the instruction of new believers and for the purpose of unifying and defining the movement. This took place with a gathering of Anabaptist preachers at Schleitheim on February 24, 1527. The confession of faith they adopted, probably penned by former Benedictine prior Michael Sattler beforehand, is the earliest of the Reformation confessions, and takes the form of a church manual covering baptism, the ban, breaking of bread, separation from abomination, pastors, the sword and the oath. It instructs believers to be separate from the world, especially the worldly churches (Art. IV), gathering instead as faithful, baptized, disciplined believers (Arts. I, II, III) led by congregationally called pastors (Art. V). Believers must not take the sword or swear allegiance to any earthly Power; their strongest punishment is the ban and their loyalty is to Christ. The sword belongs to the earthly powers for whom it is ordained (Arts. VI, VII). The first five articles serve to define the church in distinction to other religious bodies. The last two define the church as separate from the sword and the state. This clarified the position of the Anabaptist mainstream against those who sought reconciliation with the state and against violent revolutionaries

who might be otherwise sympathetic, like Thomas Muntzer and the peasant rebels. It also stated clearly that the state's power "is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ" (Art. V). It punishes and puts to death the wicked and guards and protects the good, but no Christian can be a magistrate "according to the flesh," because it would violate the New Testament teachings on separation and nonresistance (Art. V).

This "view of the state was to prove their most far-reaching contribution to the modern world," leading ultimately to the concept of separation of church and state.[20] A benign separation of church and state was beyond the insight of most central European powers at that time, however. It was difficult for outsiders to distinguish the violent from the nonresistant, and questionable whether the religious powers had any interest in doing so.

The initial Dutch stream of Anabaptism followed a pattern somewhat similar to the Swiss: a mainstream group emerged against both liberal and radical pressures but over a longer time and taken to greater extremes. In 1534, a radical group led by Jan van Leyden and Jan Matthys staged a violent revolution in which they took over the city of Muenster. They were known especially for their vision of a New Jerusalem and their institution of polygamy, and were duly crushed by neighboring armies. Smaller attempts at revolution took place elsewhere. These posed a serious threat to those who sought to

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[20] W. Estep, The Anabaptist Story, 194. Estep, a Baptist, cannot quite accept this separation as complete.

hold the New Testament line on nonresistance, Caesar and moral purity. The apocalyptic preaching of men like Melchior Hoffman bordered on revolution and may have influenced the Muenster disciples. It was at the hands of some sent by those who later led the Muenster faction that Obbe Phillips and his followers (including Menno Simons) received baptism and ordination -- although not without grave reservations about their intent.[21] Muenster showed that Anabaptists could pose a clear danger to social order but also to genuine faith.

There was also pressure toward spiritualizing the concept of separation and compromising corollaries of that separation. Official persecution continued in Switzerland, but Anabaptists in Holland came to enjoy toleration after a generation or two. For the Dutch, toleration proved a challenge in some ways greater than persecution. Many Dutch Anabaptists became wealthy. Some groups became relatively moderate, especially the Waterlanders, who influenced the development of English Baptist groups. The Waterlanders introduced conferences and more formal confessions of faith, and contributed to the war effort of the Prince of Orange in 1568. While some modern interpreters see this as a "refreshing emphasis" that went "beyond the theological insights of the biblical Anabaptism of the sixteenth century,"[22] more conservative Mennonites of their own time were not charitable. The Waterlanders accepted those banned by other

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[21] Ibid., 109-112.

[22] Ibid., 126-128.

Mennonite groups, who labeled them as *De Drekwagon* (the garbage wagon).[23] They were seen by their conservative counterparts as having drifted over the line between church and world; yet, many of these began to drift, also. The Mennonites drifted into business, society, politics, and even the military. By the time he had compiled the Martyr's Mirror in 1660, Theileman Van de Braght felt compelled to declare that "these are sad times in which we live; nay, truly there is more danger now than in the times of our fathers, who suffered death for the testimony of the Lord."[24] It was not until 1632, after some decline, that the various Dutch factions found unity along conservative lines in the peace agreement and confession of faith signed at Dordrecht.

To some extent, the Swiss and Dutch streams of Anabaptism had developed independently; the differences became important in the seventeenth century. For the Swiss Brethren, especially for those in the Emmental valley, continued persecution meant that they were separate from the state and culture by definition. Those in the Reformed church who had sympathies toward them were known as *treu-herzigen* (true-hearted) or *halbtaufer* (half-anabaptist), and were seen as friends and providers of needed assistance. It could perhaps be said that for the Swiss, the devil was like a roaring lion, still trying to coerce people from the faith. For the Dutch, the Muenster debacle showed that there could be "Anabaptists" so-called whose

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[23] E. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches (Hartville, OH: Diakonia Ministries, 1987), 91.

[24] "Preface," Martyr's Mirror, 8

teaching was outright evil, and state tolerance minimized externally defining pressure. They had to define themselves in distinction to groups who claimed their identity but not their beliefs. For them, it could be said that the devil was as an angel of light, seeking to seduce people from the faith.[25]

The difference becomes apparent when looking at the issue of the Ban. The Swiss had described the Ban at Schleitheim, defining it briefly as excommunication. Some of the Dutch took it to its logical conclusions, refusing to eat with offenders (1 Cor. 5:11) and even advocating marital avoidance, while others tried to take a less drastic course. Dutch divisions were sometimes harsh and may have contributed to Obbe Phillips' apostasy from the movement and Menno Simons' despair at the end of his life. The peace agreement at Dordrecht described the Ban, or *meidung*, as necessary "for the amendment, and not for the destruction, of offenders; so that what is pure may be separated from that which is impure" (Art. XVI). The member so banned is "an example and warning to others" so that "the church may be kept pure," so that the name of the Lord not "be blasphemed, the church dishonored, and a stumbling block thrown in the way of those without," and so that the offender might be convinced of his error "and brought to repentance and amendment of life" (Art. XVI). The erring should be watched over "in all meekness to the amendment of their ways" and be reproved "as the case may require."

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[25] The communal Hutterites, who faced severe persecution in Austria and south Germany, formed an entirely separate stream of Anabaptism after the sixteenth century.

An additional article on shunning (XVII) calls for the obstinate offender to be avoided "by all the members of the church (particularly by those to whom his misdeeds are known) [sic], whether it be in eating or drinking, or other such like social matters" to the end that "we may not become defiled by intercourse with him" but that he may be made ashamed" and eventually "induced to amend his ways." Care must be taken that shunning and reproof "may not be conducive to his ruin, but be serviceable to his amendment." The offender's physical needs should be cared for, and "we must not treat such offenders as enemies, but exhort them as brethren. . . so that they may again become reconciled to God and the church" (Art. XVII). Thus the Dordrecht Confession retains the strict practice of the Ban while seeking to ensure that it is done with a loving spirit. Schleitheim had taken its Ban from Matthew 18. The Dordrecht articles, interestingly, do not mention this passage but draw largely on the writings of Paul.

The application of the Ban has been a contentious issue for Mennonites, and especially among the Amish, throughout their history. One Beachy Amish author notes that Amish divisions thought to be over variations of lifestyle have actually been over application of the *streng meidung* (strong or strict ban).[26] It may be that a deeper issue underlies that of the Ban: how does one recognize the true church of Christ? How does a separated group decide what other similar groups are of like mind and faith?[27] The issue was impor-

[26] E. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 85-99.

tant for those with a memory of Muenster and continued to be so for those who watched their fellow believers abandon one Gospel teaching after another as they grew wealthy and cold in the world. The New Testament teaches a disciplined church, yet how does this church exercise such discipline? The Schleitheim Confession provided brief counsel, but it is not known to have been widely adopted among the Dutch.[28] The Dordrecht Confession provided more extensive guidelines among the Dutch and also among the Mennonites of Alsace, who "entirely adopted it as our own" in 1660 (postscript).

The Amish division of 1693 brought these differences to fruition. Some historians have dismissed Jacob Amman's mission to Switzerland as the work of a rash, young traditionalist "agitating for changes" among Swiss Brethren.[29] Amman may have been Swiss by birth, but he was in fact a French Mennonite bishop sent by twenty or twenty-two Alsatian ministers to Switzerland to try to convince the Swiss Brethren of the Dordrecht Confession, which they had never formally adopted. Amman was specifically concerned with Swiss laxity in excommunicating a known liar and with the status of the *halbtaufer*. He was concerned to a lesser degree with twice-yearly communion (possibly out of consideration for women of childbearing age) and literal feetwashing. His attempt at meeting the senior

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[27] S. Yoder, My Beloved Brethren, 259-260.

[28] It is not in the Martyr's Mirror.

[29] S. Nolt, A History of the Amish (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992) 26. Nolt does not mention Dordrecht as an issue, as does E. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 47 and 55.

Swiss bishop, Hans Reist, in conference failed: Reist refused to show. If Amman was young and rash (as he later confessed), Reist may have been aloof and calculating. A frustrated Amman eventually declared Reist and his followers excommunicated and division ensued. A significant minority of Swiss Brethren, primarily *Oberlanders* from west of Bern, followed Amman, while those of the Emmental Valley sided with Reist. Amman and his fellow leaders tried to effect reconciliation with the Reist group several times, going as far as to place themselves in the Ban in 1698 and 1700 as discipline for their rashness. They hoped that their act of humility and repentance would bring the Swiss Brethren to reconsider their position, but it would not be so. The split spread north into the Palatinate, and eventually into Holland, and by 1711 was permanent.[30]

The Amish emerged, then, as a strict version of the Mennonites and those Swiss Brethren who adopted the Dordrecht Confession. As they began to define themselves in distinction to their drifting counterparts, their emphasis on nonconformity was heightened. The Amish continued to sing their hymns from the Ausbund (a collection of martyr hymns first published around 1564), pray from Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht (the Devoted Christian's Prayer Book), and read from the Martyr's Mirror -- all of which are still used today. As they were excluded from trade guilds they became proficient, even

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[30] S. Nolt's treatment of the split (A History of the Amish, 23-41) is helpful in highlighting regional influences, but fails to distinguish between Mennonites and Swiss Brethren. E. Yoder's account (The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 43-59) makes the distinction, but could provide more thorough documentation.

famous, as farmers. Because they did not foster ties to established Protestants or to the *halbtaufer*, they were less reticent to leave Switzerland and the upper Rhineland for the Netherlands, and eventually for America, when the government required it.

It was probably political pressure, and not just economic opportunity, that drove Amish emigration. The Swiss cantons raised money by sending young men to fight in foreign wars; neither the Brethren nor the Amish wanted any part of this, although many acculturated Mennonites, and eventually some Amish, came to support Europe's rising militarism in the next two centuries. About five hundred Amish chose to leave this context for a new life in Pennsylvania between 1727 and 1760. While this number is small, it is interesting to note that the names of this first wave of immigrants are much more common among the Amish today than are those of the much larger second wave, which took place between 1820 and 1860. During this time, European nations were making wide use of military conscription, and the American midwest was open to settlement. Many of the new Amish emigrants joined established communities, while some formed new settlements. The two groups differed in more than date of migration. The first had originated mostly in Switzerland and the Palatinate and the second in Alsace, Bavaria and Hesse. The first had experienced the frontier and attempted neutrality in the French and Indian War and the Revolution. The second had experienced the Industrial Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The eighteenth-century immigrants had been able

to hold to their separate identity in the new, English-speaking land. Those of the nineteenth had seen greater social change and were often more change-oriented.[31] The Amish who remained in Europe after 1860 were weak, and most merged with remaining acculturated Mennonites by 1900. The last Amish church in Europe, at Ixheim in Alsace, did so in 1937.[32]

The American Amish experience in the 1800s was one of growth, drift and division. While some governmental pressure toward military service and social conformity continued, the consequences of refusing to conform were lessened. Revivalism proved a more formidable threat, as did common use of the English language. Revivalism stressed an individual experience of conversion but tended to do so with Protestant assumptions about the Church and culture. The Amish and the more conservative Mennonites believed in conversion but placed it in the context of a changed life lived out over years, subjected individual feelings to communal discernment, and placed a high value on suffering, self-denial and separation. Those who adopted Revivalist thinking tended instead to adopt the English language and with it an American Protestant spirituality.[33] Revivalist groups sometimes challenged the wider culture toward

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[31] E. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 67-69.

[32] S. Nolt, A History of the Amish, 182-184. Actually, there are two today -- at Waterford, Ireland and Poperinge, Belgium -- the result of recent American Beachy Amish missions.

[33] Revivalism's effect can be seen in Mennonite hymnody. The Mennonite Church Hymnal of 1927, for example, was compiled after a massive influx of former Amish Mennonites into the Mennonite Church; yet it has relatively few selections by Mennonite authors, and none from the Ausbund. It is used widely in plain Mennonite and Beachy churches today.

reform, say, for temperance or against slavery, but did not generally advocate establishing the Church as a separate social entity eschewing involvement in secular power politics.[34] Many Amish felt this pressure keenly and sought to counter it. Many others, especially newer immigrants, wanted to moderate their separation.

The use of the Ban and the definition of the true church in relation to wider society underlay the ensuing Amish conflicts and divisions. There was no one division; rather, there was a "sorting out," a process in which those who held to the old *ordnung* (order) parted from those who saw themselves as progressive.[35] The former group felt that the specific standards of life outlined in the *ordnung* had profound spiritual value: they expressed a yielded and loving spirit, and protected members from pride, laxity, vanity and individualism. Yielding to Christ and one another meant that self must die, and with it rebellious expressions of self-will.[36] The idol of self must not be allowed to stand before a holy and powerful God, especially when Christ, who died for sinners and is seated in majesty, will judge each soul.[37] The close unity of congregations was dependent on the yielded humility of members, and such humility

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[34] There was considerable diversity among revivalists, of course. Today, some of their evangelical descendants are starting to grapple with their own cultural isolation.

[35] S. Nolt, A History of the Amish, 126.

[36] Sandra Cronk, "*Gelassenheit*: The Rites of the Redemptive Process in Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite Communities," Mennonite Quarterly Review 55 (1981): 7, 8, 35 and passim.

[37] Cronk writes as a modern Quaker (ibid., 6-7), and fails to recognize this key point of Amish Christology.

was absent when the old ways were thrown out. The true church was characterized by this unity and humility, and it was guarded, and partly defined, by the strict Ban. The Ban in this context was to be the "Ban of Jesus," designed to draw obstinate sinners to repentance, rather than the "Ban of the Pharisees," which uses the same method without the requisite love and compassion.[38] The latter, "progressive" groups did not see this. They felt that the rules of the *ordnung* existed for their own sake, and were a legalistic adding to" Scripture. They also saw great potential for and some practice of hypocrisy among those who meticulously followed traditions they did not understand while neglecting "weightier matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23). They tended to see the true church as spiritually defined, and true faith as a matter of the heart. In progressive eyes, the elder who declared that hook-and-eye coats were necessary for belonging to the true church and dismissed a heartfelt conversion experience was a blind Pharisee, adding to the Bible what it did not teach. In conservative eyes, the young man who wore fashionable clothing, glowed with enthusiasm for new theological ideas and declared that he was "called" to proclaim the gospel, was a selfish rebel unwilling to subject himself to God's church and, ultimately, unwilling to subject himself to God. The accusations of both were at once extreme, and yet more true than anyone would want to admit.

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[38] E. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 92.

Several instances led to the national Amish *Diener Versammlungen* (Minister's Meetings) of 1862-1878, and the idea had been proposed by both conservative and progressive leaders. The idea was initially to come to a peaceful unity around the Bible. While the meetings did succeed in bringing some resolution to local conflicts in Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania for a time, and did clarify the Amish position against militarism, secret societies, photographs and musical instruments, they did not bring lasting unity. Generally, the solution proposed was for the conservatives to be more tolerant of the progressives and their changes.[39]

An oft-cited example of the kind of conflict that plagued the Amish is that of Old Order minister Moses Hartz. In 1894, Moses' son, Moses, Jr., took a job as a traveling millwright. This meant that he missed some church services and wore clothing that violated the church standard. Rather than listen to church counsel to find other employment, Moses, Jr., left the church and, unable to join even a progressive Amish-Mennonite church, joined a Mennonite congregation. He was placed under the Ban and shunned by his home church, but his father refused to shun him. Moses, Sr., was silenced, and years later sought to join an Amish-Mennonite church himself. This was a thorny issue for the receiving congregation, who eventually received him and his wife as lay members. After some waffling, the Old Order church placed Moses, Sr., and his wife in the Ban, and a division in that church resulted in an Old Order

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[39] Nolt, A History of the Amish, 132 and 136.

congregation that sought to establish itself without the *streng meidung* (strict Ban). It may be worth noting that Moses, Jr., eventually left the Mennonites and joined the Society of Friends.[40]

Amish progressives may have felt that the conservatives were in danger of dying out as Pharisaical relics. Conservatives may have felt that spiritual rebellion among the progressives would end in the destruction of the church. If this is true, the conservative fears were well-founded. After 1872, the majority progressive Amish Mennonites organized regional conferences, and by the early twentieth century discarded their Amish identity altogether and merged with area Mennonites (sometimes forming a majority of the resulting conferences). After 1927, only the Old Order Amish, the Ontario Amish Mennonite Conference, the emerging Beachy Amish and the Conservative Amish Mennonite Conference retained the Amish name.[41] Many progressive Amish Mennonites were eager to shed their Amish name and identity, and their descendants continued the trend. In fact, "very few churches or individuals that descended from Amish Mennonites contributed to the post-1950 conservative Mennonite

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[40] E. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 104-108, and S. Nolt, A History of the Amish, 204-207.

[41] The Conservative Amish Mennonites became the Conservative Mennonite Conference in 1954; the Ontario Amish Mennonites followed suit in 1963; The Stuckey Amish had previously done so, and merged with the General Conference Mennonite Church in 1945. The Egli Amish had become the Defenseless Mennonites, and in 1948 became the Evangelical Mennonite Church.

movement,"[42] although the Beachy Amish and Conservative Conference Mennonites have had some influence there.

The Beachy Amish arose out of the split surrounding the Hartz case, above, and out of a split among Old Order Amish along the Pennsylvania-Maryland border in 1927. Before 1895, they had been one people, but the Maryland group had become more progressive, and affiliated with the Conservative Amish Mennonites. The question arose of what to do with members who wanted to transfer from the Pennsylvania to the Maryland group. Under the leadership of Pennsylvania bishop Moses Yoder, and against the counsel of the Indiana bishop who had helped to ordain him, the answer was strict shunning. Yoder was in poor health, however, and he requested that a bishop ordination be held in 1916. The lot fell to one Moses Beachy, who had serious differences of conviction: he could not enforce the strict Ban for this offense. Yoder's health apparently rallied, for he found himself in opposition to his new bishop. Formal division ensued in 1927. Within two years, automobiles were permitted among the Beachy faction; tractors and electricity soon followed. Fraternal relations with the Weavertown group that had emerged following the Hartz case were established in 1929, and other like-minded Old Order Amish have continued to unite with the fellowship to the present.

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[42] Stephen Scott, An Introduction to Old Order and Conservative Mennonite Groups (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1996), 8. Scott is a convert to the Old Order River Brethren.

In Old Order eyes, many people "go Beachy" so that they can have the stability of a Plain lifestyle with the convenience of modern culture. The desire to use cars or tractors with tires certainly figures in the decisions of some, but the Beachy Amish point out that there are other, more spiritual reasons. One of the foremost of these is the gradual departure of many Old Orders from the separatist Biblicism of their ancestors. Tolerance of immoral practices such as bed-courtship and drunkenness, moral laxity among youth, and the persistent occult religion of *brauchen* have all revulsed many Old Order Amish who read their Bibles. People who live near the Amish are at times shocked and amused to hear of police raids on the drinking parties of Amish youth.[43] So far, the Beachy response has been to urge sober and consistent Christian living, and not simply to discard impediments to cultural assimilation. Whether this remains true into the next few generations remains to be seen.

The Beachy Amish fellowships at the beginning of the twenty-first century are one of numerous Plain Christian groups which have similar beliefs and problems and somewhat similar histories, and recognize each other informally. The Amish Brotherhood, also called the New Order Amish, arose out of missionary interest in the 1940s and 50s, and is steadily gaining adherents today among Old Order Amish concerned with moral and spiritual decline. Some groups opposing the surge of the Mennonite Church into modernism and revivalism

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[43] The Amish rightly point out that these youth have not yet been baptized into the church, and so technically should not be called Amish. Beachy Amish, and many of their neighbors, do not accept this as an excuse to wink at their behavior.

in the middle to late 1800s left, or were forced out, to become Old Order Mennonites. They have grown steadily, establishing 44 of their 103 congregations between 1960 and 1995, and as of the middle 1990s claiming about 14,000 members.[44] Several small groups emerged from the Mennonite Church after its cultural assimilation accelerated in the middle of the twentieth century. The Conservative Mennonite Movement churches vary somewhat in practice and order, but most maintain a strong, separatist identity with evangelical, Bible-centered teaching. Sometimes called "non-conference" Mennonites, they represent a particularly vigorous and influential witness among the Plain people, and tend to be prolific publishers. They hold to a strict moral code forbidding radio, television and remarriage after divorce, and generally do not fellowship with groups that do not forbid these things. By the middle 1990s they numbered about 18,000 with most groups growing steadily.[45] In addition, Plain Mennonites feel some kinship with the Hutterites, Old Order Brethren, Dunkard Brethren and other groups with similar practices, who see their goal as complete Christian consistency in all areas of life.

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[44] S. Scott, Old Order and Conservative Mennonite Groups, 30 and 72.

[45] Ibid., 162-198. The 2001 Mennonite Church Information (Harrisonburg, VA: Christian Light Press 2001) puts the number closer to 22,000, excluding the Beachy Amish and Mennonite Christian Fellowship churches, which are both of Amish background. The term "Conservative Mennonite Movement" was coined by Scott, and includes such groups as the Nationwide Fellowship Churches, the Eastern Pennsylvania (and Related Areas) Mennonite Church, the Midwest Mennonite Fellowship, numerous other regional affiliations and many independent congregations. While many eschew the internet, many of their writings are available on the internet at www.anabaptists.org.

Historical Summary

History is not a foundation for doctrine. Historiography changes over time, and the "then is now" approach to Scripture taken by Plain groups precludes giving history the place reserved for Scriptures in the teaching of the faith.[46] On the other hand, history is valuable and instructive. The true Church as set forth in the New Testament has existed throughout history to the present day, marked by genuine faith and fidelity to the Bible and the Bible's God. Most of the time, it has existed as a remnant.

The distinction between sectarian and magisterial groups noted by Ernst Troesltch in 1911 has undergone numerous subsequent revisions, most of which have attempted to discuss the relationship of different types of Christians to a wider culture that is perceived as "real" and relatively unified. Troeltsch's disciples tend have a relatively superficial understanding of sectarian Christianity, defining "church" as a great magisterial institution, and relegating those who hold to the New Testament concept of the church as an *ecclesia* (called-out group) of faithful, obedient Christians to the status of "sect."[47] A process by which remnant groups emerge from decayed or apostate institutions has been described by William McGrath, a Beachy Amish minister, as the "Sect Cycle."[48] The cycle

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[46] L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 112. This recognition contributes to the common idea of Plain groups as "ahistorical" in their perceptions.

[47] This is a major theme in Philip Kenneson, Beyond Sectarianism: Re-Imagining Church and World (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999) 8-14, 35-82.

[48] McGrath, Conservative Anabaptist Theology, 51.

begins with the emergence of a new sectarian remnant from a worldly church. The remnant withdraws, expands in mission, and is driven underground by persecution. It may then retreat into isolation, becoming ingrown, then inbred, then fragmenting and formalistic. Often, in the absence of persecution, the sect also becomes prosperous, and with prosperity comes a move back toward worldliness; drift and popular rule may then be followed by professional ministry and denominational institutions (often in the name of missions, along world-church lines). As the denomination gains members and social status, it may move into the sphere of governmental politics or merge with other like-minded groups -- often provoking schism and the emergence of new sects. Remnant groups can form anywhere in the cycle. Those that break off from formalistic sects which have lost their Biblical moorings (the Beachy Amish, for example) may struggle with their need for yielding to the fellowship as they rediscover those moorings and may be blind to the subtle influences of cultural compromise in their midst.[49] Those that emerge from acculturated denominations (the Nationwide Fellowship Churches, for example) face the struggle of discerning between their own (possibly mirror-image) reactions to that drift and a genuinely Biblical *ordnung* worked out in the love of Christ.[50] Some groups form from people leaving both

[49] As warnings see D. Burkholder, The Inroads of Pietism (Baltic, OH: Amish Brotherhood Publications, tract, n.d.) 4, 5-7; T. Byler, ed., Plain Truth for Deceptive Times (Sugarcreek, OH: Carlisle Printing, 1998) 5-6 - also an Amish Brotherhood source, and J. Coblentz, Are Written Standards for the Church? (Harrisonburg, VA: Christian Light Publications, 1990, 1991), 8-10. Coblentz is from the Midwestern Mennonite Fellowship.

[50] See D. Burkholder, The Inroads of Pietism, 7, 11-12, and T. Byler, ed., Plain Truth for Deceptive Times, 5-6, and J. Coblentz, Are Written Standards for the Church?, 6-7, 11-14.

stages at once, and some may join any group for selfish, carnal or mixed reasons. In any case, the remnant groups seek, as did their spiritual predecessors, to fulfill the call of complete faithfulness and honest submission of every area of life to the Word of God.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL BASES FOR DISCERNING THE REMNANT CHURCH

In most respects, sectarian Plain fellowships hold to an orthodox, evangelical theology. The apostle's creed is often included with confessions of faith, and the basic dogmatic content of their preaching is little different from what would be found among conservative Evangelicals of an Arminian variety. They are Biblicists, and the Bible, especially the New Testament, continues to serve as a corrective when traditions need reevaluating.[1] The Zurich radicals who first parted ways with Ulrich Zwingli did so not over basic theology but over how far Zwingli was, or was not, willing to go in obeying the Scriptures. The Anabaptist attitude is reflected in the words of martyr Balthasar Hubmaier: "I may err, I am a man, but a heretic I cannot be, because I ask constantly for instruction in the Word of God."[2]

Ecclesiology

One doctrinal point on which Plain Anabaptists have consistently differed from established church systems is the nature of

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[1] Few would continue to accept the Heavenly Flesh Christology of Dirk Phillips or Menno Simons, for example. In the same vein, traditional practices that have crept in, such as *brauchen* and bed-courtship, are seen by an increasing number as wrong.

[2] W. Estep, The Anabaptist Story, 65 and 141.

the church. As has been discussed above, Anabaptists reject the notion of the institutional Constantinian church, the "Christian" nation or territory on its knees. Instead, they have held that the true church is a visible, separated assembly of those who trust Jesus and obey His Word. To the Plain Christian, the church necessarily consists of those who have faith, who are committed to be faithful in the Body of Christ. It consists of those who have freely and without coercion entered into this faith by means of conviction, conversion, repentance, trust in God and amendment of life, and who have submitted to baptism in the Body of Christ. It consists of members who, though certainly imperfect, strive to obey Christ by living out the commands of Scripture in all areas of life. The true church is the Body of Christ, characterized by interdependence between members, unity of purpose, and some uniformity of character (Phil. 2:1-2). It is the Bride of Christ, characterized by purity of heart and anticipation of final consummation. It is the House of Christ, a strong fortress against which the gates of hell cannot prevail, and a divine household characterized by love, order and submission to God and one another. It is an advance of the Kingdom of God, a holy nation and a separate people who are ruled from Heaven, provisionally subject to every authority among men, but ultimately subject to Christ alone. This concept of the true church is not a theoretical ideal to serve as a distant goal but a living reality to be worked out in the context of everyday life. There is no Platonic separation here between the reality we experience and the reality we know ought to be somehow: the Plain imperative is to

obey the revealed will of Christ sincerely, thus bringing the true church into reality now.[3]

Anabaptist Biblicism

The basic impetus of the Anabaptist vision from a Plain church perspective is complete and consistent obedience to the Bible in every area of life. Among mainline Anabaptists, the vision of complete obedience to Christ found particularly cogent expression in 1944 with the publication of The Anabaptist Vision,[4] but wholistic discipleship was already a particular concern among Plain Anabaptist groups. The call to whole-life obedience to the Bible is expressed in older devotional texts,[5] as well as in the current writings of Plain people.[6] The fundamental reason for Biblicism is the teaching of Christ that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). The Bible for the believing church is not merely an ancient source of wisdom to be mined at will: it is

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[3] As an example of this Platonic separation from a Protestant perspective, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954; orig. published in Germany in 1938), 31-39. Bonhoeffer does not seem to be aware of the enduring experience of spiritual unity common to Plain groups.

[4] H.S. Bender, The Anabaptist Vision (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 20.

[5] See for example A Devoted Christian's Prayer Book (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishers, n.d.), 55. This is an English translation of Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht of 1708 and earlier. Its reflection on yielding to the teachings of the Bible is in a section called "Rules of a Godly Life," which is part of the Geistliches Lust-Gartlein frommer Seelen, included in editions after 1846. See also The Heart of Man: Either a Temple of God or The Habitation of Satan (Harrisburg, PA: Theo. F. Scheffer 1842), 58. Originally published in French in 1732, this book is circulated in German among the Amish as Herz des Menschen.

[6] See for example L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 102, as well as D. Burkholder, The Inroads of Pietism, 4 and passim, and People Call Us Mennonites (Crockett, KY: Rod and Staff, tract, n.d.), 2-3.

God's Word, by which Christians are bound. The Bible and its teachings are also more than an historically determined "interpretive framework" for looking at the world, as if one could somehow opt for other frameworks as needed.[7] The Bible is revealed Scripture -- perhaps it would be correct to say that sectarian Anabaptists have a creedal understanding of the Bible, to say that they believe it is actually true and not merely symbolic of some ethereal truth.[8] Those who characterize the Plain churches as fundamentalist would be partly right; but they predate Christian fundamentalism by a few centuries, and reject the Protestant ethical and epistemological assumptions inherent in fundamentalist thought.[9] They could be accused of making an idol of the Bible; but no one who actually seeks to obey what the Bible teaches is apt to make an idol of anything.

The New Testament Church is called such because that is where it derives its teaching and identity. The New Testament fulfills and completes the Old, and what we can see of the Old is only possible through the lens of the New. Early Anabaptists asserted that the New Testament held such primacy that Christians could no longer justify many practices common to the magisterial churches, most notably

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[7] This seems to be the stance of post-liberal Biblicists such as George Lindbeck and others, see P. Kenneson, Beyond Sectarianism, 22-23.

[8] Moderns, conversely, have a creedal understanding of "science." That "scientific" truth changes drastically from generation to generation was noted in 1928 by D. Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible, 139f.

[9] The accusation is too simplistic. Fundamentalism is a complex movement in its own right, and the influence of modern fundamentalism among the Plain churches is undeniable; however, the process of interpretation and application among Plain Anabaptists is very different from the fundamentalist standard.

infant baptism and the state church, on the basis of the Old Testament. The stance of the true Christian, and the true Church, toward the Bible is not one of critical analysis but one of obedience (*gehorsam*) and subjection. It is only as one stands under the authority of Christ, and hence of Scripture that one can begin to understand the Scripture and come to know Christ its Author. Jesus is alive and active in the believing church today (Matt. 18:19-20). The faith its members have in Him produces yielded, submitted hearts ready to do His will as revealed in His word. They study it together, and appoint leaders in such a way that pride and ambition are stifled, because "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20-21). There is not contrived a grand conflict between New Testament writers, as if one could play them against each other throughout history. Rather than use modern assumptions to fit the Bible to modern culture (as do liberals, evangelicals and fundamentalists), Plain Anabaptists seek to construct an alternative culture based on the Bible, thus denying modern culture the privilege of defining the terms of relevance.

No one does this perfectly. "We like to think that our church standards are taken solely from the Bible, but this is seldom true. Many of them are reactions or responses to pressures faced in the past."[10] Still, to rebel against what the Bible, especially the New Testament, teaches in any area, even when its significance for contemporary society is unclear, is to despise the expressed will of

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[10] L. Bauman, The Little Flock, 114.

God (1 Thess. 4:8). To postulate a faith in which one claims revelations of the Spirit independently of Scriptural truth is to fall into inspirationism.[11] To make the Bible subject to history is to make it subject to whatever view of history one adopts as authoritative. To demand it meet the test of relevance to contemporary culture is ultimately to bow before the spirit of the age. The church's task, rather, is to create a culture of obedience, and over time a heritage of obedience, to what Christ has taught through the Scriptures.

The Culture of Obedience

The inward expression of this culture of obedience within the soul (and its relationships) is an attitude of submission to the authority of God. It finds its basis in the example of Christ (Phil. 2:3-11), and was described by medieval Germans, as it is known among mainline Anabaptists today, as *gelassenheit* (yieldedness).[12] The term is not commonly used in Plain circles, but the concept it represents lies at the root of the Plain spiritual life. Genuine Christian living requires a submissive spirit not only toward God but also toward the structures of authority that God has ordained. That submissive spirit requires a love for others that God has commanded and exemplified in Christ. It pervades every area of in-

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[11] The effects of the trap can be seen not only in the well-known lapses of some modern charismatics, but also in the life and teaching of the Society of Friends, with whom the Anabaptists once had much in common.

[12] "Yieldedness" is a literal translation common among mainline Anabaptist scholars, and is used as a technical term in this paper. It refers to a "paradoxical power of powerlessness" in which Christians yield to God's will, and is the principle by which the social order functions" in Plain groups. See S. Cronk, "*Gelassenheit* and the Rites of Redemptive Process," 7ff.

dividual and interpersonal life.[13] Thus the structures of authority are driven by submission, rather than a will to power. A wife submits to her husband but to the husband is given the charge of humbly loving his wife and placing her interests above his own. Parents discipline their children, and strictly, but the goal is to do so as God exemplifies, for their good and not just as the parents see fit (Heb. 12:5-11). Members of the church try not to elevate themselves above one another, for to do so is to display the opposite of a Christlike heart.

This is perhaps seen most clearly in lot ordination, which is practiced in most Plain Mennonite churches.[14] The general practice is for several men to be nominated for leadership by secret polling of the congregation. At the ordination service, and after much prayer, identical hymnals are given to each man nominated, one of which has a slip of paper with Proverbs 16:33 written on it. No one in the service knows which hymnal has the slip until they are opened. The one who thus draws the lot is ordained for life. The church has had a say, but the call is considered to have come from God. It did not originate with the individual ordained, and those who are seen as advancing themselves are not likely to be nominated. He did not win a popular election. He has been entrusted with the call by the grace of God, and must not use his position as a means

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[13] Ibid. See also D. Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible, 471, L. Gingerich, The Church: A Theocracy, 54, and A Devoted Christian's Prayer Book, passim, esp. 55-80.

[14] The lot is taken from Acts 1. Among the Old Brethren the call to ordination is not by lot but by anonymous congregational vote without prior nomination, the idea being that the Spirit can thus speak, as in Acts 13.

of securing personal dominance, even in subtle ways, but rather have a servant's heart. This system does not always prevent conflict or abuse of power, but the conflicts and abuses common to Plain churches are subtle compared to those of most Protestant fellowships and tend to arise over subjects that most Protestants, and most mainline Anabaptists, find trivial or confusing.[15]

The culture of obedience to the will of Christ finds its more visible, outward expression in the many ways that Plain churches do not conform to the fashions of the world. Plain Anabaptists believe that genuine submission to Christ as Lord necessarily means some independence from the culture around them.[16] Nonconformity to the world means conformity to something, and that something is the written or unwritten *ordnung*, or standard, of the congregation.[17] The *ordnung* has often been developed over generations by people who have sought to live out this culture of yielded obedience, and its detailed regulation of everyday life represents their collective view of how it can be done. Thus, clothing is made or bought for its Biblical purpose: to cover the body modestly, and not to flaunt, even subtly, physical beauty or material wealth. Vehicles and appliances are to be bought for utility and durability and not to show off or elevate oneself above others who must work hard for less. On

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[15] For example, Plain churches argue over styles of head coverings, automobiles, or permissible occupations, rather than over universalism, homosexuality or the inspiration of Scripture.

[16] Kauffman, Doctrines of the Bible, 503.

[17] Conversely, nonconformity to the church standard means conformity to something else in the wider culture.

a more obvious level, the State exists to punish evildoers, but Christians are to have no part of it, either as its agents, or by going to law to demand privileges that really exist by God's mercy rather than government decree. Entanglement with Caesar is a sure way to forfeit a heritage of submission, obedience and conformity to Christ.[18] Such attention to detail opens Plain groups to the painful charge of legalism. The potential for hypocrisy is very great, as is the possibility of Plain-clothed deception. It is easy to become complacent when reaping the benefits of the discipline and suffering of one's forebearers. Secret evil among people who appear honest and righteous is especially pernicious, because it makes a mockery of what should be a holy life. The sins of unbaptized Old Order Amish youth are obvious to those who live near them. The secret evil of *brauchen* is less obvious to outsiders.

On the other hand, Plain people recognize the necessity of being faithful in small and large things alike. Rebellion that drives a Plain young man to insist on wearing a stylish shirt or drive a sporty car is the same rebellion that, in a different social context, might drive another to some act of cruelty or violence. The fact that one is seen as socially "normal" while the other is condemned does not change the matter. Sin is sin; sin covered by hypocrisy is a worse evil. It does not therefore follow that there is virtue in open sin. The solution to having wolves in sheep's

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[18] Nonresistance is thus a product of a nonconformity which results from genuine conformity to Jesus, who refused Caesar-like power. Those who abandon nonconformity will likely also abandon nonresistance, either in favor of militarism or pacifism.

clothing is separation from falsehood, not to dressing the flock as wolves.[19] To do that would be to abandon the governing spirit of obedience and submission at the core of Plain Christianity.

Sectarian Plain churches thus attempt to maintain a consistent ethic of submission to the commands of Scripture that applies inwardly and outwardly, within the soul and within the family and congregation, among the brotherhood and with like-minded believers, toward the state and its authorities, and ultimately toward God. The individual who has yielded his or her life wholly to Christ strives to know nothing but Him crucified and spends much time in prayer, for prayer "is the soul of the Christian life, when prayer ceaseth, all good must cease -- prayer is spiritual breathing."[20] The family also gathers daily for a time of worship and prayer, for bearing one another's burdens and lifting their hearts to Christ. The family is a microcosm of the church, with parents as ministers, and children as active members. Consistent, daily family worship "makes the home a type of heaven, the dwelling place of God. The family altar is heaven's threshold."[21] One convert to plain Christianity notes that many converts testify that "the love the plain people have in their homes is what drew them to the church."[22] The family's day, centered around worship, is a microcosm of the church's week, centered

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[19] See W. McGrath, Separation Throughout Church History, 13.

[20] The Heart of Man, 40.

[21] R. Border, ed., Family Worship (Minerva, OH: Amish-Mennonite Publishers, tract, n.d.), 1.

[22] Philip Cohen, Weeping May Endure for a Night (Deer Lodge, TN: Lighthouse Publishing, 1996), 60.

around gathered worship on the Lord's day. The Lord's day is devoted to worship, fellowship and rest. For the most part, Plain Christians do not work or go to restaurants or other places of business on the Lord's day, although it is a good time to visit with the sick, aged or lonely. The congregation on the Lord's day is something of a microcosm of the coming Kingdom of Heaven, when all those who follow Christ will be gathered to worship Him from every tribe, nation, language and time.

Theological Summary

The inward and outward expressions of yielded obedience to Christ and His Word are interwoven. The whole of the Plain Christian life is oriented toward seeking to follow Christ's revealed Word completely, at any cost. Such a life of obedience means that similar place can be given to no other power, and that those who hold to this life will necessarily be on the fringes of the dominant cultures and societies that those who seek power construct around themselves. It has always been so. Whether that dominant society is a pagan city or an imperial church, from the time of Christ to the present day -- and even in much of the Old Testament -- those who live a consistent Biblical faith are a remnant, gathered together by the grace of God.

When a church spends more time dissecting the truth than obeying it, it is in very deep trouble. The truth of God's remnant church is infinitely greater than this attempt to analyze it. The reality of the Plain Christian life is hard to describe to those on the outside, and the stark contrast between what one finds there and

what one finds in the world is hard to articulate to those on the inside. On one hand, one runs the risk of a glowing idealism that overlooks the very real faults of Plain people. A couple I met who have been among Plain Mennonite fellowships in Wisconsin for four years told me that "it took us a couple of years to find out that these people do bleed." On the other hand, one runs the risk of making a consistent, Biblical system of faith and life simple enough for any sincere Christian with an eighth-grade education to understand into something cloudy and confusing. The Biblical, historical and theological roots and nature of the true and faithful Church are best discerned by avoiding both pitfalls. Such discernment necessarily underlies any consideration of this Church's role and mission in the world.

CHAPTER 4

THE MISSIONARY REMNANT CHURCH

This chapter will focus on the missionary activity and purpose of the Plain, sectarian Anabaptist churches, and especially on the work of the Beachy Amish Mennonite fellowship. The Beachy Amish were latecomers to the missionary scene. Their major efforts started in 1952 with the organization of the Mission Interest Committee, which initially included Old Order Amish, and with the founding of Amish Mennonite Aid in 1955. The mainline Mennonite churches had been deeply involved in missions from the early years of the Protestant missions movements that arose from the Great Awakening. Russian and Dutch Mennonites had supported Bible Society ministries from the early 1800s, and the Dutch supported British Baptist missionary endeavors in India by 1824. In 1847, the Dutch Mennonite Missionary Association was organized to send missionaries to the Dutch East Indies. Missionary involvement gained momentum, and today there are Mennonite churches in scores of countries, with the majority being outside Europe and North America.[1] Many conservative Mennonites

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[1] Wilbert Shenk in By Faith They Went Out: Mennonite Missions 1850-1999 (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2000) provides a more than adequate history of mainline Mennonite missions and their relation to the Evangelical Protestant world, especially in Chapters 2 and 4. The extent to which these mission churches are Anabaptist or Mennonite beyond their name and "historical link" to Mennonite missionaries has been called into question for some time. See also R. Ramseyer, Mission and the Peace Witness (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1979), 115.

and Amish were reluctant to adopt the new emphasis. The early Anabaptists had been highly mission-oriented, but their descendants had found relief from persecution and a measure of toleration and comfort by withdrawing into isolation as *Die Stillen im Lande* (the quiet ones in the land). They sought to be faithful to the New Testament way of obedience and the traditions of their ancestors (and sometimes more to the latter) and were often not willing to engage in witness along Protestant lines. The focus of this chapter is on more recent missionary endeavor among those who have maintained a strong, separatist ethic and identity.

Missionary Vision

The basic imperative of the Plain Anabaptist vision of the church is complete and consistent obedience to the Bible in all of life, at any cost. This is the driving motivation for the mission of the church. The burden of this chapter is to argue that the present Amish Mennonite vision for mission is fundamentally consistent with the Plain conception of the Church as radically obedient. It is the tradition-bound refusal to testify to faith that is inconsistent with whole-life discipleship. Mission necessarily flows from obedience to God, and it takes place through the true Church, the Remnant of the people of God. In every age, such a Remnant exists to fulfill God's mission on the earth. It has always been so. In the Old Testament Remnant the vision and mission of Israel as God's light to the nations is preserved (Gen. 12:3, Isa. 49:5-6, 60:3). Through the dispersion of Jewish remnant groups in ancient times, a way is prepared for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. The New

Testament Church inherits and expands the Remnant mission: it is commanded to teach all nations to obey the commands of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). Sometimes New Testament missionaries are sent out, as were Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-3), and sometimes they are driven from one place to another by persecution (Acts 8:4) or perhaps other factors, but at all times the command of the Great Commission is binding on the church.

As did many sectarian groups before them, early Anabaptists rediscovered this charge. The Protestant state churches disregarded it since Europe was already seen as "Christian" by decree. The Roman Catholics were widely engaged in missionary endeavors. The Roman Church incorporated some groups that sought to live out a form of radical discipleship as monastic orders, and these groups often assumed missionary responsibility. The mission in which they engaged tended to mix with political and military ambitions, however, and often became an extension of a Catholic *corpus Christianum*. At their worst, Catholic missionary orders were agents of the Inquisition, persecuting and killing thousands of people who earnestly sought to live by the New Testament. To the Anabaptists, no Christian could do this, no institution was the Church of Christ that did not require a voluntary faith in and obedience to Christ, and anything outside the true, obedient Church was a mission field. They were willing to proclaim the Gospel in any territory, and often paid for it with martyrdom and severe persecution.[2]

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[2] See William McGrath, Conservative Anabaptist Theology, 53-56 and Shenk, By Faith They Went Out, 20-24.

Many Anabaptists, having separated themselves from the surrounding, pseudo-Christian culture, eventually retreated into isolation as they sought to live quiet, faithful, peaceful lives. Their isolation did grant them some freedom from the worst persecution (as did the cultural assimilation of some other Anabaptists), but any group that dares to be separate will still run afoul of the dominant culture sometimes, and they were no exception. Many a young Amish or Mennonite man faced punishment for his refusal to bear arms in "Christian" Europe or America. Some Plain people have faced reprisals for refusing to participate in educational or other social programs of the dominant cultures around them.[3] The Amish and conservative Mennonites were quietists, and had no organized evangelistic ministry or mission, but they were not totally without the capability to witness with their lives when they felt Christian obedience required it.

The influence of Pietist movements, the Great Awakenings and the revivals of the 1800s among Mennonites, and among the Amish, is undeniable. Many wholeheartedly embraced these revivals and their missionary implications, and even the conservatives who resisted them were challenged to consider the importance of personal faith and conversion in a way that had perhaps been forgotten. While these movements certainly played a role in propelling Amish Mennonites and

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[3] Stories of Amish and Mennonites who refused to fight Indians and other national enemies are still read in Amish schools today; see for example Our Heritage (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishing, 1968). In their chapter entitled "Religious Freedom in America" Clifton Yoder and Raymond Horst (in The Church Triumphant) devote most of the chapter to the slaughter of nonresistant Christian Indians by Pennsylvania militiamen on March 8, 1782.

others like them into mission, one could perhaps also credit the United States Selective Service System and its requirements of alternative service for young men after World War II. Amish Mennonite Aid, for example, was initially begun to provide relief and assistance to refugees fleeing East Germany in the 1950s and used many men fulfilling their alternative service requirements in the work.[4] As the Beachy Amish have participated in relief work, some have encountered other churches that are struggling toward the same vision of whole life Christianity that they have embraced.[5] Many have sensed a call to plant Plain, Anabaptist churches in new areas, and sometimes that call comes from those who have been helped. In addition, many conservative Mennonite groups have sensed a need to minister in areas where there is no nonconformed, non-resistant witness, regardless of national boundaries. Often this takes place by colonization: several families move together to a new area to evangelize there. More recently, Beachy Amish fellowships have been established in Kenya by following up on people who have expressed an interest through correspondence study with a conservative Mennonite publisher. In all cases, the resulting congregations are actual, Plain Anabaptist churches, readily recognizable

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[4] Ervin Hershberger, ed., Into the Highways and Hedges: Amish Mennonite Aid Mission Report (London, OH: Amish Mennonite Aid, 1980), 1-3, 20, 25-26. Today, "the main focus and work of AMA is establishing churches where the unadulterated Word of God, true discipleship, and Anabaptist values are taught," according to introductory material in the Amish Mennonite Directory - 2000 (Millersburg, OH: Abana Books, 2000), 12.

[5] This is especially true in former Communist countries where churches that were once nonconformed by government decree must now decide whether they want to conform to whatever secular culture develops (Willis Bontrager, former Christian Aid Ministries missionary to Romania, interviewed by author, 14 September 2000).

by Plain Anabaptist churches elsewhere.[6] It could be argued that members' identity as Plain Anabaptist Christians supersedes their previous national, linguistic or racial identity. The missionaries sent in this work are not trained professionals but generally ordinary, working-class individuals and families. They have the sense of conversion and call common to their home churches, but to a large degree their work has taken place independently of the assumptions of organized, modern Protestant missiology.

Plain Church Missionary Insights

Plain Anabaptist Christians seek to obey the whole Bible in all of life, and the Great Commission must be obeyed in this same light. At least three insights have arisen in the Plain church mission experience that have not been emphasized the same way in other traditions.

First, the church and its ministry are so defined that the entire church is responsible for fulfilling the Great Commission, not just some specialized arm thereof. The world is so defined that whoever and whatever does not belong to the true church is the mission field. The church is the people of God, separated from the world as holy in order to proclaim His praises (1 Pet. 2:9-10). It is to be both a standard to the world and witness to the world. It may or may not have a specialized program in evangelism or witness, but it does have a mission to the world, whether that world consists

[6] Two exceptions are the Friedensheim fellowship in Berlin and Fellowship Haven in Washington, D.C., both of which are no longer affiliated with the Beachy Amish. The churches in Kenya are growing rapidly, but many members have AIDS, and are dying as fast as new members are brought in (Daniel Bontrager, former AMA missionary and AMA board member, interviewed by the author, 23 October 2000).

of secular Americans, nominal Christians in Africa, or devout syncretist Catholics in Latin America. There is necessarily a clear division between the Church and the world. The world is a very complex place, and there are many divisions within the world itself, but none are so marked as the division between those who follow Jesus Christ and those who do not. There are no Christian nations from which the Gospel can be sent. Some nations are influenced by certain Christian teachings, and some are more tolerant of Christians than others, but no nation has yet been won to Christ. Rather, as in the book of Acts, the true church exists as a missionary minority. It is called to make disciples from all nations, calling them into a new identity as the people of God.

Second, the Great Commission allows no truncated, easily swallowed Gospel; it requires "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever" Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:20). This requirement has two corollaries. The first is that, just as the Church is committed to whole-life obedience to the Scriptures at any cost, so converts are taught a yielded, whole-life obedience. The Gospel must penetrate deeply into all areas of life, and especially into the life of the church, so that new Christian disciples are brought into a new identity and a new unity under a new Lord, Jesus. They are to acknowledge no other Lord and must be prepared to suffer at the hands of those who would urge them to do so. They must be very clear in their own minds, and make it clear to others as need be that their allegiance to Jesus as Lord is both exclusive and absolute,

that they confess with the Apostles that "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The second corollary is that such a whole-life obedience to Christ requires the fellowship, example and discipline of like-minded believers in a separated, clearly definable New Testament Church. Such a Church is an assembly, a community, called out by God from the world. It is Jesus' church and can be coopted by no other power. It provides a clear alternative to the world, an alternative characterized by yieldedness and love within the fellowship, and by compassion and integrity toward all. During the Salvadoran civil war of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, several members of Catholic and Protestant churches were murdered for their perceived political leanings. The Beachy Amish, conversely, were recognized as neutral by both sides and, although there was no recognized right to conscientious objection, their converts were not forced into the military.[7] If the Church loses its ability to remain separate from the world, it eventually loses its attachment to Christ as absolute Lord, and thus its ability to teach and exemplify Christ's ways. There is some truth to the idea that the world must be "kept at bay," but this must not become an end in itself. [8] Although the true church will be culturally distinct wherever it goes, it must take care that its distinction is the result of its conformity to the yielded obedience that it finds in the Bible. If this conformity is replaced by a primarily ethnic, racial or social identity, the

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[7] Daniel Bontrager, interview, 23 October 2000.

[8] See W. Shenk, By Faith they Went Out, 43.

church has lost its purpose. This danger is obvious among groups such as the Old Order Amish, but it is also present in groups whose identity has been formed in conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, middle-class America. The church does not go into the Third World as an agent of Western ideals, nor does it witness in the West as an agent of some political movement. The church is the agent of the Kingdom of God. It recognizes that it fails in many ways to represent its King, but it is in the nature of human beings to conform. The church seeks to conform to the Word of God.

Third, the Great Commission requires the corporate life witness of a believing Church. It is not addressed to an individual but to a group of disciples. The witness of the Gospel to individuals makes no sense if there is not somewhere a people who lives by this Gospel. The Bible's message of peace, love, hope or faith, is just idealism unless those things are evident in the actual group life of a congregation. Just as the teachings of Christ must be lived out in actual reality, the mission of Christ also must take place in actual reality. Mission flows from obedience to God, and it flows through the life of the Church. When the Church has the privilege of planning and executing mission, mission is a product of its life. Missionaries are sent out to serve by their congregations, especially in those tradition which, like the Beachy Amish, allow the call to service to come through the Body. Missionaries are considered volunteers rather than professional missionaries in the Protestant sense. Some do receive a stipend, some are assisted by the offerings of their home church and some are self-supporting. It is very common

for young adults to devote one or several years of their lives to some sort of voluntary service, and sometimes this is extended into something of a missionary career. Sometimes congregations send out several families to colonize a new area, thus providing support to one another in the new work. Some see this as a preferred method.[9] Colonization has been the method used by Beachy Amish moving into Costa Rica, and Costa Rican members have now established a church in Nicaragua. Colonization is practiced even among groups with no overt evangelistic program. Old German Baptists, for example, have no organized evangelism, but have remarkable success in attracting seekers from non-Plain backgrounds. In some cases, colonization is practiced because of population, economic, or sociopolitical pressures as much as out of a desire to evangelize.

The mission of the Plain churches does not call for grand plans and strategies for, say, winning the entire world for Christ in one generation. Plain Anabaptists tend not to think in grand, terms -- it is not realistic, and it foments a prideful spirit that kills true missionary endeavor. The mission of the Plain churches is very simply to obey Christ, and in so doing to bear witness to him by forming simple, Plain groups of consistently committed Christian disciples across the world. It may be that the method of witness most typical of Plain groups throughout their history is the continuing witness of communities driven from one place to another by the powers of the world (as in Acts 11). As noted, many Plain fellowships have more recently begun commissioning and sending small

[9] For example Yoder and Horst, The Church Triumphant, 58.

groups specifically to engage in evangelistic missions (as in Acts 13).[10] But in either case, the call is more to faithfulness in small things than to strategies for religious conquest.

The motives for mission among Plain churches are not always pure. Some may go to the mission field because they desire recognition. Some may have a rebellious spirit, or a desire power or influence. People often go into new areas for economic or social opportunity. The Beachy Amish that first went to Costa Rica in 1968 did so for evangelism but also for cheaper land, a slower pace of life, and fewer governmental controls.[11] It may be that the actual experience of missions in unfamiliar territory has a way of purifying the heart. It is often those who seem unimportant that accomplish what is most important in the long run. Among the Beachy Amish, to say nothing of the work of many other Plain groups or many fruitful cooperative efforts, Plain congregations have been established in new areas of the United States and Canada, and in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Kenya, Belgium, Ireland and Romania. These are not large, and certainly not very influential, but they are established with the hope that they will serve as living outposts of the Kingdom of a very large God.

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[10] Wilbert Shenk, in Write the Vision: The Church Renewed (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 92, refers to these as "organic" and "sending" modes of mission, respectively.

[11] Elmer Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 259-260.

PART TWO: PLAINNESS AND MISSION IN THE POST-CHRISTENDOM ERA

CHAPTER 5

CHRISTENDOM AND MODERNITY IN SECTARIAN PERSPECTIVE

To virtually any student of Western Christianity, the decline of Christian influence and prestige over the twentieth century has been obvious, and in many ways dramatic. While North America and Europe at the century's beginning considered themselves "Christian" territory, with the churches exercising either official or unofficial normative power in defining and perpetuating "civilization", that claim could hardly be made in the past twenty years. The religious and moral atmosphere of the post-Victorian era was influenced by the revivals of previous years, and bolstered the power of churches as they built many of the great social institutions, the colleges and hospitals and charitable organizations, of that time. It gave way first to a benign, universal relativism, expressed in the ecumenical and interfaith dialogues prominent in the middle part of the century, and then to the "in your face" pluralism of competing voices and values (and sometimes violence) that came to mark life in the 1990s, with no arbitrating moral authority save the coercive power of an increasingly amoral state. The loss of Western Christian moral dominance in the past century

has been well documented.[1] What is often overlooked, however, is the context in which these changes have taken place: the cultural alliance of Western Christendom over the past sixteen hundred years, its decline over the past four hundred and the present post-Christian and postmodern era in which we now live.

Christendom

The Rise of Christendom

Christendom as an alliance between the emerging Catholic Church and the Roman Empire first emerged during the fourth century. Born with the reign of Constantine, it came into its prime in the *corpus Christianum* of the Middle Ages. It drastically and irrevocably changed the nature of those churches and Christians that joined with it, or that dared to separate from it. In its early years there was much concern with establishing an orthodoxy in harmony with the teaching of the Apostles. As it matured, however, its emphasis began to shift toward maintaining and using worldly power. Its effects have lasted well into modern times, and many of the theological and ethical assumptions inherent to Christendom continue to form the bases not only of magisterial Christianity, but also of much secular thought.[2]

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[1] This has been done by many authors and from a variety of perspectives, but see for example Douglas John Hall, The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Mike Regele and Mark Schulz, Death of the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, Resident Aliens (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); see also Loren Mead, The Once and Future Church (Washington: The Alban Institute, 1991).

[2] See John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 6 and 233-250.

By the time of Augustine (ca. 395-430), the Church had come to see as appropriate the use of imperial force to curb heretics; although Augustine later retreated from this position, one of the things for which he is known is assenting to the use of force against the Donatists after failing to win them by persuasion. While Augustine developed a theology of salvation by the grace of God, this was combined with a doctrine of the Church that left no possibility for salvation outside the Catholic communion. When the Catholic communion accepted the practice of using imperial force to execute its will against its perceived adversaries, those who sought to live out salvation by grace through faith faced a stark choice: submit to the authority of the Catholic church with at least lip-service, or face persecution and condemnation for leaving. Faith in such a context no longer meant a yielded and obedient trust in Christ as Lord over all life; rather, it meant assent to whatever the Catholic church taught. Put another way, the mission of the Church was no longer to bring people out of the world and into a believing, obedient and faithful colony of the Kingdom of God; it was now the mission of the Church to produce obedient citizens over which it could rule.

Medieval Christendom and the Magisterial Reformation

This shift became crucial with the fall of Rome and the spread of the Church in Europe. The disparate kingdoms of Europe were united by the Catholic faith, and the Catholic faith was seated at Rome. Titles and power structures of the Empire were imported wholesale into the Church. Local kings and princes needed the cooperation

of the Church to rule their people, who placed their hope of salvation in the Church. Europe was seen as Christian territory, and all who lived there were "Christians" by default.[3] If any missionary activity took place, it was generally beyond the borders of this Christendom, and for the purpose of extending this "Christian" civilization. Even when the Renaissance brought about a renewed interest in classical learning, a new humanism that emphasized reason and experience, and a new interest in reading and the Bible, the definition of faith as assent allowed the system of Christendom to remain in force for several centuries. The magisterial Reformation of the 1500s represented a change within Christendom, a shift in power from church to crown. The magisterial Reformers still held to their territories as "Christian" lands, defended with Christian" armies and ruled by "Christian" kings and princes. They still considered their own dominions part of Christendom, and so the Constantinian synthesis remained.

The Enlightenment

It could be argued that Christendom began to crumble with the Enlightenment. It could also be argued that the Enlightenment was a natural outgrowth of a state Christendom with an *assensus* faith. Against the backdrop of conflicts like the Thirty Years' War, in which "Christian" rulers and armies nearly destroyed a religiously divided Europe, thinkers such as Francis Bacon (who separated science from theology, and favored discovering truth by observation and

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[3] Except for heretics and Jews, of course, who were variously persecuted or tolerated.

induction) and Rene Descartes (who also separated science from theology, and favored discovering truth by deduction and the "natural light" of reason) emerged to proclaim that truth could be found by reason, without the benefit of the Church or its combating theologies. Having rid themselves of the constraints of a Christendom Church, their heirs set out to develop new and different approaches to government and society based on the "natural" rights of human beings. In most European countries, the magisterial churches retained their positions of power and influence, at least on a nominal level, but began to allow for the toleration of dissident views. In all likelihood, the dissident views had been there all along, giving due lip service to the Church as required.[4] In some countries, such as France and especially the emerging United States, the Church was given no official status at all. Yet even here, the churches continued to hold influence on the populace, and hence the culture, for some time. In the United States, it could be argued that the very separation of church and state led to voluntarily held religious views that were stronger, more vigorous, and more open to revival than those of Europe, where "Christian" faith was assumed. European society embraced modernity, and especially secularism, by the early twentieth century. By the late twentieth century, modern secularism also came to dominate North America.[5]

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[4] As, for example, with the "recantation" of Galileo.

[5] So note George Hunter in Church for the Unchurched (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 20, and Wilbert Shenk, Write the Vision, 39-40.

Christendom in Sectarian Perspective

In sectarian perspective, Christendom was something of a farce. Sectarians tended to view themselves as the Remnant of the true Church, who quit the project of Christendom in favor of actual obedience to the commands of Scripture. They saw themselves, to some degree, as agents and colonies of the Kingdom of Heaven, strangers and aliens that could not use brute force to bring about genuine Christian convictions. Sectarians were apt to point out that those in positions of power became corrupt, and that their faith was fraught with pagan habits and rituals that were not commanded in Scripture. The post-Enlightenment decline, and eventual demise, of Christendom as a governing alliance was not a fall away from genuine Christianity but from a shallow pretense of faith without real obedience to Christ. Christendom had used the things that belong to the Kingdom of God as means to fulfill the desires for power and legitimacy of political and social leaders. True Christian obedience saw the Kingdom of God not as a means to power but as an end in itself.

This being said, there have been some tangible benefits for sectarian Christians in post-Enlightenment Christendom. Tolerance by modern, secular states has allowed them to prosper materially with a solid Biblical work ethic. Secular states where Christendom has held sway have continued to allow varying degrees of freedom for sectarian Christians to practice and propagate their faith without state interference, even to the point of providing some tax exemption for religious enterprises. Of course, benefits like this are

rightly recognized as gifts from God. They do not come from our own righteousness. Rather, these benefits are a by-product of a fading liberal Protestant Christendom that values religious freedom as a desirable thing, and God can take them away at any time. Whether sectarian Christians will be able to hold to their convictions if this happens remains to be seen.

Modernity and Postmodernity

Modernity

The modern philosophies that emerged from the Enlightenment, and in many ways found their way into the Church, were characterized by the assumption of a direct correspondence between the ideas and words of a rational mind and actual reality. Descartes, Newton and others who made this assumption did not credit their belief in rationality to the social context in which they lived; rather, they posited that their conception of a rational mind was "natural". They perceived the universe as something of a machine governed by laws and principles of operation which any rational human mind could, over time, comprehend by means of logic and observation.

Enlightenment philosophy did not initially set out to discredit Christianity. Many philosophers sought (as did Descartes) to prove the existence of God, and some (George Berkeley, for example) were churchmen. God was seen as the author and originator of the laws and principles of the universe; but they were to be discovered and interpreted by reason, rather than the tenets of any particular religion. The Roman Catholic Church had been the patron of Greek philosophy in the Middle Ages, but as it reacted against the threats

of Protestantism and philosophical innovation, many philosophers drifted away from organized religion, and by the nineteenth century many were openly hostile to Christianity itself. The religious impulse that fueled the Enlightenment subjected even religious tenets to the rational mind and tended to melt religions into a generalized system of "core" values assumed common to all of them.[6] Being subject to reason alone, Enlightenment faith did not require the particular revelation of a particular God.

To the emerging modern mind, the laws and principles of the universe were to be interpreted by the rational, autonomous, individual self as the basic unit of human existence. Modernity's emphasis on the rational self was accompanied by an emphasis on the rational state as the primary unit of social organization, one that eclipsed smaller units such as the family or congregation in importance and formative influence. This contributed to the notion that religion, and especially primitive Christianity, was a matter related to the individual, while social matters and history itself were to be guided by the rational state. Indeed, this had been latent in magisterial Christianity from the time of Constantine,[7] and

> what medieval Christendom, with its vision of the divine stability of all the members of the *corpus Christianum*, has in common with post-enlightenment progressivism is precisely the assumption that history has moved us past the

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[6] This was nothing new; the heretic Mani had sought the same thing in the third century. This impulse finds notable expression today in the liberal Quaker and Unitarian groups frequently found on and near university campuses.

[7] R. Clapp, A Peculiar People, 29-30.

> time of primitive Christianity and therefore out from under the relevance of the apostolic witness on this question.[8]

Those who held to a wholistic view of Biblical Christianity, who refused to "operate with two different sets of convictions," tended to be persecuted as heretics under Christendom and dismissed as irrelevant "sectarians" under modernity.[9] The charge of sectarianism in a legal context was expanded in the latter half of the twentieth century to encompass any institutions that were "identifiably religious," even magisterial ones that once sponsored Western culture.[10] In late modernity, the Western world has come to recognize that it no longer requires the sponsorship of Christianity or any other particular religion.

In modernity, reality was thought to be so constructed that any two rational minds could observe a phenomenon and come to the same conclusions about its nature. Knowledge was thought to be so constructed that ideas, theories and observations could be built on each other, the goal being a body of truth built on "firm", empirical foundations. These concepts formed the basis of the scientific method, and thus of the scientific and technological revolutions of the last three centuries. The "modern" world view is what emerged from this philosophy.

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[8] J. H. Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 236.

[9] P. Kenneson, Beyond Sectarianism, 53-62.

[10] Ibid., 29-30.

Postmodernity

The core assumptions of modern thought, then, are three: that knowledge is built foundationally, that words at their simplest level have a direct reference to reality, and that objects and ideas can be analyzed into parts and then explained in terms of the behavior of those parts.[11] Postmodernism points out that the assumptions of modern thought are, in fact, assumptions. Modern Western philosophy claims objectivity in relation to other philosophies, but forgets that it has its own required "master narrative" that can and should be called into question.[12]

Postmodern thought is centerless: there is no unifying postmodern philosophy. In postmodern minds, the rational quest for universal knowledge dissipates, because there are no longer agreed standards of rationality. Science has been helpful, but its allure is lost in an increasing variety of gadgets that provide meaningless convenience. Some postmodernists, such as Jacques Derrida, make the claim that there is no natural logic, that there is not a clear line between reality and the language used to describe it.[13] Moreover, logical systems cannot be divorced from the will to power of those who devise them. Soviet doctors of the last generation, for example,

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[11] Nancey Murphy, Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion and Ethics (Boulder, CO: HarperCollins-Westview Press, 1997), 8-18.

[12] P. Kenneson, Beyond Sectarianism, 73-82, discusses the relationship between the master narrative of liberal democracy (which is derived from, but not exactly identical to, Enlightenment modernism as discussed here) and that of the Bible at some length.

[13] Stanley Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 148.

could argue that Christians who claimed to hear God's voice in prayer were dangerous schizophrenics, when their only danger was to Communist philosophical assumptions. I am familiar with at least one oral anecdote in which American psychiatrists of the same era did a similar thing, forcibly hospitalizing a Pentecostal woman who "heard God" in her spirit and "saw him" in the glory of creation. Some postmodernists, such as Michel Foucault, go so far as to hold that attempting to know anything, and thus master it, is a form of violence.[14] While postmodernists reject the core assumptions of modernity, they do not give much of an alternative. The eclecticism of late modernity still produces individuals with varying, and sometimes inwardly conflicting, allegiances and beliefs. Postmodernists are no exception.

In fact, "it appears that much of what is called postmodern in contemporary Western culture is nothing but pure modernity finally hitting the streets."[15] The eclectic, fragmented self of postmodernism is an extension of the modern autonomous individual. The denial of foundations or logic results not in freedom, but rather in some other logic, and usually some other foundations. Postmodernism rebels against the idea of a single world view but does not appear to be prepared for the consequences of a world where people follow multiple and contradictory world views. Like modernism, it is built on the shifting sands of human experience and reason. It can recog-

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[14] Ibid., 131-134.

[15] N. Murphy, Anglo-American Postmodernity, 209.

nize the falsehood of modern objectivity but cannot seem to give a better alternative. Modernism as a unifying world view may have reached full force in Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, but the postmodern disintegration of unifying world views has hardly begun.

Christians Grappling with Modernity and Postmodernity

All this has had some effect on Christians, of course. Liberal Christianity experienced growth early in the twentieth century, having capitulated its faith to modernity when modernity was in bloom and much of institutional Christendom was still in force. Liberal churches began to decline when their members, and their members' children, realized that being modern did not require church membership or even Christian beliefs. Aside from their role of nominal political sponsorship, the liberal churches by the 1980s were "like an aging dowager, living in a decaying mansion on the edge of town, bankrupt and penniless, house decaying around her but acting as if her family still controlled the city,"[16] with naught but a few post-liberal academics crying out the need to reexamine the nature of the church and to return to its master narrative.

Evangelical Protestants reacted against the liberal capitulation of faith with a robust assertion that the historic teachings of the Church, and especially the Bible, were true.[17] Evangelicals

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[16] S. Hauerwas and W. Willimon, Resident Aliens, 29.

[17] The Evangelical movement of the present day is in many ways the descendant of the Fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth century, and is often called Fundamentalist in academic or liberal circles. The term "Fundamentalism," however, has evolved far beyond its original definition as a Christian theological movement, and is often used in a pejorative sense. I prefer to use it only in reference to those groups who retain the Fundamentalist label for themselves as indicative of their militancy in maintaining the movement's heritage. See for example G. Dollar, A History

experienced considerable growth in the middle of the century. While they retained a stated loyalty to the Bible as the Word of God, they used modern criteria to interpret it. Thus, the Bible was to be defended as scientifically true (and this was admirably done), as if science provided the basis of truth. Evangelicalism, "with its focus on scientific thinking, the empirical approach, and common sense" was thus a child of modernity.[18] For some, a reliance on science as the basis of truth, coupled with a Christendom *assensus* concept of faith, led to the Biblical core of faith becoming compartmentalized, and thus isolated from ethical decisionmaking. Evangelicals shared with liberals the modern notion that the rational individual and the rational state were the primary units of social organization. Biblical teachings on nonresistance, nonconformity, and the Remnant nature of the church, were privatized, leaving the individual "free" to embrace the patriotic values of the state, the economic values of the corporate world, and, eventually, the moral values of television. The Bible was God's word, but the autonomous believer was to interpret it as a "storehouse of facts," much like science interprets nature.[19] Evangelicals have tried to be influential on the political scene, with some modest successes and some failures. Many have seen their social mission as "benevolent subversion,"[20] infil-

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of American Fundamentalism (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), 288-9.

[18] S. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, 10.

[19] So noted Princeton theologian Charles Hodge. See George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 112.

[20] See Richard Halverson, The Living Body (Gresham, OR: Vision House,

trating the present Western society as individuals rather than providing an alternative one. It may be that the Evangelical goal has been "to make of America something she never was, a Christian Nation.[sic]" [21] But the attempt, paradoxically, often costs more influence than it yields, as many (perhaps most) Evangelicals seem to become a mere minority voting bloc of the American Republican party, just one more voice in a chorus of groups vying to exercise political will, rather than a viable representation of the kingdom of God on earth. Evangelicals are hobbled by charges of hypocrisy, and end up settling for a Gospel that is often limited to individual conversion and, sometimes, family life.[22] It may be that, as Christendom crumbles more, Evangelicals will be able to repent, and recognize what the secular world has seen all along: that the "real" world does not really believe the Bible or worship the Bible's God, and that in order to be true to their core beliefs, they will have to embrace their own sectarian identity and devote themselves to living out what the Bible actually teaches.

Neither liberal nor Evangelical Christianity appears prepared to witness in a postmodern world that rejects objectivity and re-

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1994), 104ff.

[21] William McGrath, The Origin, Decline and Fall of Humanism (Carrollton, OH: Amish Mennonite Publications, 1985), 21.

[22] The family life emphasis is seen especially in the explosive growth of the Evangelical home-schooling movement. Homeschoolers are often alienated in their own churches for disengaging from the formative institutions of the state, and occasionally start churches of their own. Most, however, retain a solid commitment to the Constantinian assumption that Christians should take an active part in the political process. A few filter in to Plain Anabaptist churches.

coils at grabs for power. Because it cannot acknowledge any single, universal worldview or standard of rationality, postmodernism is relativistic. Modernism claimed to be relativistic, but it was not: modernism assumed that, while no truth (certainly not religious truth) was absolute, its own view was "objective" and able to arbitrate the differences of all others, which were seen as relative. Postmodernity celebrates relativism, but has no way of discerning or arbitrating between differing traditions. Modernists claimed to be able to step outside traditions to examine them. Postmodernists note that our perceptions are inextricably bound to traditions we cannot simply step outside. How, then, can Christians witness in such an environment?

One postmodern philosopher of science discussed by Nancey Murphy, Imre Lakatos, proposes that a scientific "tradition" emerges from a "hard core" theory, unchanged by its research program, with auxiliary theories modified, amplified or replaced over time in response to data encountered. If a new version of the theories preserves the content of its predecessor, has more data than its predecessor, and can predict something about its context, it is seen as "progressive." A progressive program is "fractal-structured": each part of the program bears the same consistent "shape", or purpose, as the whole, much like snowflakes, river systems and certain plants bear a consistent shape in parts and the whole.[23] In a "progressive"

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[23] "Fractal" refers to a mathematical quality, describing a curve "such that any small part of it, enlarged, has the same statistical character as the original." Oxford English Dictionary, 2d ed., s.v. "fractal."

scientific program, each new version holds the same shape as the one before, with only slight modifications.[24]

Murphy holds that fractal philosophy "offers the best chance of evading relativism with regards to standards of rationality."[25] Drawing on post-liberal theologian George Lindbeck, she suggests that a postmodern conservative Christian theology could be similarly structured, with Scripture its core theory, and the criteria for discerning truth to be consistency with Scriptural teaching, fruit that befits Christian living and, for Anabaptists, unity in a congregation.[26] These insights are at best partial. Post-liberals still assume that there must be some rational way to discern between traditions beside the traditions themselves, some means by which Biblical Christianity provides a "more comprehensive, coherent and gripping story" than any other tradition.[27] They cannot adequately elucidate the reason that Christian faith is more comprehensive, coherent and gripping than any other, but in their desire to return to the Bible as their central narrative they do point out something that sectarian Anabaptist churches have been saying all along.

Sectarian Anabaptists such as the Beachy Amish and others believe that it is their mission to be subject to Jesus Christ as Lord, and hence to obey the teachings of the Bible, in every area of

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[24] See N. Murphy, Anglo-American Postmodernity, 53-60.

[25] Ibid., 60.

[26] Ibid., 59, 117-124. Murphy is a member of the Church of the Brethren.

[27] See P. Kenneson, Beyond Sectarianism, 77-78.

life and at any cost. They seek to be faithful as a Remnant of the true, New Testament church. Such a vision can lead to the temptation to avoid any contact with the world, but also sees that it is necessary to disengage from a wider culture in order to be utterly true to Christ, and thus to engage wider cultures as His ambassadors.[28] The Christian life that results from such a commitment, and from being attached to a community and a heritage that shares that commitment, aims for "complete Christian consistency."[29] Its goal is for every area, each detail of life, to be obedient to Christ, pervaded by an attitude of grateful submission to Him as redeeming Lord, and a genuine self-denying love for others for whom He died. Sectarian Anabaptists seek to live a fractal-structured life in which the heart, the home, work, worship and fellowship are all consistently governed by the same Spirit; and they are remarkably successful. While the Old Order Amish, many of whom have retained their outward signs of nonconformity while forgetting their Biblical roots, are sometimes known for the rebellion of their youth, the charge of gross hypocrisy, or of power hunger, is not often leveled against the Beachy Amish and similar groups.

Such a whole-life Christianity is a distinct advantage in witnessing to a postmodern world: it makes Christianity credible. Collins Okoth, a Beachy Amish convert in Kenya, writes in a devo-

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[28] D. J. Hall, The End of Christendom, 43, calls on mainline Protestants to do this very thing.

[29] Stephen Scott, An Introduction to Old Order and Conservative Mennonite Groups, 199.

tional magazine of hearing a Muslim speaker declare that Christianity is fake because Christians do not follow their own Scriptures in several specific areas.[30] Okoth states, "I felt I should shout the man down, because our particular church has applications on all those raised issues." He then goes on to reflect on Romans 2:24, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." The mission of the Church to teach all nations in the authority of Christ and to teach them everything Christ commanded has been done great harm by the sale of its birthright for relevance to the Constantinian, and then the modern, age. A church that tries to blend in to postmodernity (whatever that turns out to be) will likely self-destruct. A true church must instead continue its course of faithfulness to the Word of God.

Conclusion

Philosophy is but an attempt to understand reality with the human mind. Philosophers through the ages have studied long and hard to pursue a knowledge of the truth, but it is a pursuit that is severely limited by human sin, and ultimately impossible without God's grace. The quest may be legitimate if it is not motivated by rebellion against God or self-sufficiency, for these will inevitably lead away from rather than toward the truth. Solomon, perhaps the wisest philosopher of all time, notes that while wisdom is desirable, it is also vain:

> of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness to the flesh. Let us hear

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[30] Collins Okoth, "God's Word! Whose?" Beside the Still Waters, 24 August 2000, 55.

> the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:12b-14).

Paul, some thousand years later, asks, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:20,25). God has given human beings a drive to search for truth, and it is the purpose of philosophy to do this. Yet, even the best philosophers are human. Sometimes they take their work too seriously, and ascribe to it an importance that is not warranted. God's truth is eternal and absolute, but human systems are temporary. Even the best human attempts at understanding and interpreting the Word of God are fallible and sin-stained. Sometimes what seems good and right for a season is later found to be a vile perversion of that Word. But the fellowship that earnestly seeks over time to put the whole Word of God into practice is not temporary, though its members die and its memory on Earth fade into obscurity. The Word of God is not a subset of philosophy, subject to human intellectual authority. It is the word of God, who gave frail and weak human minds the ability to seek out His ways, and it stands above all attempts to interpret it. A yielded faith in Christ that is consistently determined to put God's Word into practice radically relativizes the philosophies of any age, and will always be the key to understanding and witnessing to the world.

CHAPTER 6

SECTARIAN ANABAPTISTS AND MODERNITY

The common perception among modern people is that Sectarian Anabaptists, especially the Amish, hold to a premodern society that seeks to preserve the common culture of an earlier era. This has a grain of truth. The Amish and their kin are reticent to embrace social change without first taking time, sometimes generations, to measure its usefulness and consequences for the consistent way of life they seek to live out. It is not true to assert, however, that they are simply backward. Moderns tend to embrace innovation, believing that the greatest truth lies in the future. Plain people, and many others, recognize that modernity can only imagine its future, and cannot understand what the effects of its seemingly benign innovations will be. For many Plain people there is a real danger of traditionalism, of absolutizing the traditions of the past without reference to the present or future, and sometimes without understanding the meaning of the traditions themselves. Plain Christians seek to keep both past and present in perspective under Christ's lordship. Christ is the greatest truth, and Christ's ways can be learned from the Bible. The process of learning them over recent centuries has produced a heritage and a tradition that provides a place to stand in a drifting world, and a lens with which to

examine it. The modern era has had some significant challenges for the Plain Church, but many of the Plain people have met these challenges without sacrificing their core values of whole-life obedience to the Scriptures and yielded submission before God and one another. While Christendom drove the Plain Anabaptists into a quietism that shielded them from the external pressures of persecution, a relatively tolerant modernity has generated an internal tension between separation from modern culture and accommodation to it, and this has in turn affected how Plain Anabaptists have dealt with the question of mission to the modern world.

Quietism and External Pressures

From their early history, Sectarian Anabaptists have sought to embrace an ethic of complete submission to the teachings of Scripture, especially of the New Testament, at any cost. From this commitment has arisen a concept of the Church as the living (rather than institutional) Body of Christ, with structures of congregational authority as described in the New Testament. The authority of the faithful congregation is not equal to that of God, but it is divinely ordained. Sectarian Anabaptists tend to believe that it is more trustworthy to subject one's own beliefs and perceptions to those of faithful brethren than to declare, as Pietists and their modern descendants tend to do, the sovereignty of the Christian individual. Plain Christians "must value the gifts and authority God has placed within the church. Group conscience and voice must be

placed above personal opinion and judgment."[1] The authority of the congregation supersedes the authority of personal opinion. If need be it also supersedes the authority of the state, and certainly supersedes that of other cultural power structures.

This has frequently brought Sectarian Anabaptists into conflict with culture, and especially with the state. This conflict has often come to the fore in times of war and national conscription. Amish men before and during the first World War were sometimes treated brutally. The gentler treatment of conscientious objectors in subsequent wars still brought some sense of privation, but alternative service veterans today tend to see their terms as a positive experience in retrospect. Conflict with the state has continued into the late twentieth century over a variety of issues. Some heavy-handed attempts by local school districts to take over Amish schools in the 1960s eventually led to in the United States Supreme Court's ruling that, as the Amish are not a burden to society, they cannot be required to educate their children in a manner contrary to their beliefs (Wisconsin vs. Yoder et al, 1972).[2] The Amish commitment not to be a burden to society also won them some exemption from Social Security. They do not have to pay in if they agree to forfeit any benefit they might be due from the system. The discipline in

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[1] David Burkholder, The Inroads of Pietism, 11-12.

[2] See S. Nolt, A History of the Amish, 261-263, 274. This ruling was the result of efforts by mainline Christians, Jews and others who formed an organization known as the National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom, and engaged the services of William Bentley Ball to argue the case. The decision was binding in all states, but Amish in Nebraska left that state in 1982 rather than fight it out in court.

Amish and conservative Mennonite homes tends to be very strict, although usually not harsh, and this at times leads to trouble with social service personnel trained in permissive philosophies of childrearing. Plain people once considered it something of a ministry to take troubled children into their homes for foster care, but this is now uncommon, as they cannot agree to refrain from disciplining foster children or exempt them from their spiritual life. Some Amish and conservative Mennonites refuse to have their children vaccinated against certain diseases, believing that God will protect them. Several prefer to bear their children at home with the assistance of direct-entry or "lay" midwives, which are illegal in many states, or to seek alternatives to medical treatment that they feel to be more in harmony with God's created order. In all these areas, they violate the barrier that modern cultures tend to erect between the "religious" and "secular" realms of life, insisting that their obedience to the Bible and to their understanding of what it teaches be complete throughout life, even when conflict with the state results.

If Sectarian Anabaptists run into occasional conflicts with the modern state, they do so more with other real and pretended structures of authority that exist in modern culture. Many older Amish, for example, remember the yellow paint hurled at their buggies by patriotic vigilantes two generations ago. Plain Anabaptists who are employed in a secular environment often have struggles of an ethical or moral nature that their employers and co-workers do not

recognize. These may range from insisting on growing a beard or refusing to wear a national flag on one's work clothes to, perhaps more commonly, refusing to drive over the speed limit or "fudge" transit logs in order to meet government guidelines. Most of the conflicts experienced by Sectarian Anabaptists in the workplace center around little things, but the desire to be faithful in the little things tends to drive them to seek employment with likeminded believers, or self-employment, rather than "tough it out" in the secular world.

People who convert to Sectarian groups from the outside often face some kind of overt or covert conflict with their families. Most opposition is mild and recedes with time, but occasionally it is severe. In one case of which I heard, a widow with Plain Mennonite sympathies was falsely accused of child abuse by in-laws hostile to her faith, apparently because they hoped to gain custody of their grandchildren. Her husband had been raised in an upper economic class, she had not been, and this was a long standing source of conflict with his parents. Rather than try to fight a legal challenge from her wealthy relatives, she fled to Central America, and on return to the United States was arrested and her children placed in the in-law's custody. All charges against her were soon dropped, however.[3] Converts from non-Western cultures where tolerance is less prevalent may face more serious conflict.

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[3] David L. Miller, "Observations", Calvary Messenger, March 2000, 13-14.

Conflicts such as these tend to reinforce the quietism that has historically marked Anabaptist life. Webster defines quietism as a "form of religious mysticism;"[4] Anabaptist quietism refers to the tendency of groups to withdraw into isolation from a culture perceived as hostile. Such withdrawal has some benefit in making Christians less dependent on those who do not share their view of Scripture or its ethical corollaries and provides additional benefit in making Christians dependent on each other. To a certain extent, cultural withdrawal is forced on Sectarian Anabaptists from the outside. As long as they are faithful to what they believe, and as long as they insist on bringing all of life under the authority of their faith in Christ, conflict with those who do not believe the Bible or truly regard Jesus as Lord is inevitable. The Plain fellowships are growing at a rapid rate, largely because their members have large families and retain a very high proportion of their youth, but also because they are accepting an increasing number of converts. The Old Order Amish, for example, tend to double in membership every fifteen to twenty years. The Beachy Amish do so every twenty to thirty years, and Old Order Mennonites, independent conservative Mennonites and Eastern Pennsylvania conservative Mennonites at a somewhat slower rate of every thirty to forty years.[5] Their growth may in-

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[4] Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1989), s.v. "quietism."

[5] W. McGrath notes this in Conservative Anabaptist Theology, 3-10. My understanding from personal conversations is that Old Order German Baptist Brethren are experiencing similar growth.

crease the incidence of conflict with the secular world and may contribute to a constructive re-examination of Plain beliefs. For the most part, however, the Plain experience in late modernity has been one of toleration and prosperity, which bring their own challenges and conflicts for a separated people.

Internal Pressures toward Isolation or Absorption

Plain Anabaptists face twin pressures in the tolerant atmosphere of late modernity. First, they are tempted to further isolate themselves, thus protecting themselves from the influences of a culture that is in many ways increasingly inimical to Christian values but compromising their ability to witness to outsiders in the process. They are also tempted, however, to give in to the culture's seductive invitations to participate in and adopt its values and practices. The former temptation may be a struggle for Old Order Amish, Mennonite or Brethren groups, who separated from their counterparts in the nineteenth century as those counterparts were acculturating to the Evangelical Revivals of that time, or to groups such as the Nationwide Fellowship Churches who emerged from the rapidly acculturating Mennonite Church after 1950. The latter temptation is probably a greater struggle among the Beachy Amish, who have emerged from a stricter Old Order setting.

The Plain tendency toward isolation is probably seen most clearly among the Old Order groups, who have held to traditional practices most tenaciously. Ideally, the spiritual priority in holding to traditions is a yielded submission to God, with loving

consideration of others and obedience to the Scripture, as well as a strong concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, the people of the Living God. These are the priorities of a culture of obedience. Ideally, historical lines from Scripture to tradition are fairly clear. For example, many Amish men are aware that their coats are fastened right over left (instead of the "normal" left over right) because it once showed that they cannot draw a concealed weapon from within their coat with the right hand. Ideally, the motive that leads toward isolation is a sincere desire to preserve the spiritual priorities of submission, love and obedience when these are being lost. Ideally, these are the dynamics that govern groups that have tended toward isolation, and to some extent, many of them have been true to the ideal, and are able to bear witness to Christ without the benefit of officially organized missions or evangelistic programs. Some have not, however. When these spiritual priorities are lost, and the lines between Scripture and tradition are unclear, there is a great danger of holding to tradition for its own sake and of a resulting formalism. This leads to a life that is outwardly distinct from the wider culture, but is not a witness for Christ.

The tendency toward acculturation has been seen repeatedly in the many Mennonite and other Anabaptist groups that have drifted into the mainstream of their surrounding cultures, from the Waterlanders in sixteenth-century Holland to the fully acculturated denominations of today. For the Beachy Amish and similar groups, the move toward acculturation is seen especially in the recent experi-

ence of the Conservative Mennonite Conference as it has dropped many of its traditional stands. Ideally, the motive for approaching the cultural mainstream is to better bear witness to Christ and be wholly obedient to Him, to make Christian disciples that will obey Christ fully from a whole heart. Ideally, traditions are not cavalierly discarded but are rather reinterpreted and transformed so that the lines between Scripture and tradition become clear. Ideally, the core values of submission, love and obedience are retained, and govern the life, witness and program of these congregations, while their identity as the people of God is strengthened by their witness in the world. Ideally these dynamics govern the life of those groups that have moved toward the mainstream, and to some degree this is so, especially if compared to the church life of established Protestant groups.

Anabaptists, Liberalism and Evangelicalism

Mennonites and other Anabaptists are related to modernity in several different ways. A few Plain people bought into modernity early on by accepting liberal Protestant ideals. Some, like the Stuckey Amish, came to tolerate a belief in universalism as early as 1872, and eventually drifted into the General Conference Mennonite Church.[6] Many others, especially the (Old) Mennonite Church and, to a certain degree, the Church of the Brethren, accepted the beliefs

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[6] S. Nolt, A History of the Amish, 146-151.

of early Fundamentalism and liberal Protestantism in turn over two, three or four generations.[7] A few other groups became essentially indistinguishable from other conservative Evangelicals.

Those Anabaptist groups which have retained their Plain identity have been deeply influenced by conservative Evangelical movements with whom they share a high stated view of the authority of the Bible. Plain Anabaptists readily admit that they are more likely to use the writings of those who claim to believe the Bible than of their liberal Mennonite or Brethren cousins who no longer do. The liberal belief in naturalism and the reduction of the Kingdom of God to an internal ethical, religious or political force very loosely based on Jesus' teachings,[8] did not lend itself to conservative Evangelical faith; neither has it lent itself to the whole-life discipleship that Plain Anabaptist Christians seek. Plain people have sometimes found the permissive personal lifestyles of many liberal Mennonites and Brethren since the 1960s and 1970s offensive. In addition, the militaristic and nationalistic pressures that gave them pause in relation to their conservative Evangelical friends prior to the cessation of the draft a generation ago have eased considerably, and it is not unusual to see conservative Evangelicals in search of consistent discipleship filter in to Plain churches.

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[7] It is interesting to note that, among Brethren, it was the main, moderate-conservative wing of the 1881-1883 splits that took the most liberal turn after the 1940s. The "progressive" wing, which became the Brethren Church and the Grace Brethren, adopted conservative Evangelicalism wholesale.

[8] See G. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 50.

It does not follow, however, that Plain Anabaptists have adopted conservative Evangelical beliefs and values entirely. Conservative Evangelicalism, in Plain circles, represents dangerous worldward drift as much as a defense of the Bible. The Beachy Amish may, for example, easily accept the doctrine of plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible, but they do not accept a hermeneutic that makes the relationship of the Bible to theology analogous to that of nature to science.[9] Evangelicals have tended to read the Bible through the lens of Common Sense Realism, a philosophy that undergirded the Princeton theology of the 1800s and the Fundamentalist movement emerging from it.[10] To the conservative Evangelical mind, the truth of the Bible is immediately discernible to any rational individual. Plain Anabaptists reject an individualistic reading of Scripture, preferring instead to be subject to one another in a yielded fellowship of like-minded believers. Plain Anabaptists hold that "the authority of Scripture is the authority of its ultimate source, God Himself," and feel it is inappropriate for a Christian to approach the Bible as

> a proud intellectual who has found Christian theism superior to all rival systems of thought (although this is indeed the case). He comes rather as a penitent seeker who has been awakened to his need by the powerful and discerning Word of God.[11]

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[9] Ibid., 112.

[10] Ibid., 110, and see E. Sandeen, The Origins of Fundamentalism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 3.

[11] John C. Wenger, God's Word Written (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1968; reprint, Northville, MI: Biblical Viewpoints Publications, 1999), 32 and 42 (page references are to reprint edition). Wenger refers to a new

Conservative Evangelicals stress the importance of literal belief in Christ's virgin birth, miracles, substitutionary death, resurrection and return. Plain Anabaptists agree, but add nonconformity, non-resistance, modesty and humility to the list, refusing to set them aside as non-essential. Plain Anabaptists tend to read the Bible through the lens of a whole-life submission to Christ. This includes assent to Bible doctrines, but goes much farther:

> Beloved friend, if you desire to live a holy and God-pleasing life, and to inherit a home in heaven after this life, then you must bring ALL of your life, all your thoughts, words and actions into subjection to the teachings of the Bible, as God has commanded.[12]

An early Mennonite confession of faith (1600) further asserts that the New Testament must not

> be diminished, or anything added thereto, nor may it be bent and distorted according to one's individual opinions; but all Christians are in duty bound to bow their whole heart, mind and soul under the obedience of Christ and the mind of the Holy Spirit expressed in the Holy Scriptures, and to regulate and measure their whole faith and conversation according to the import thereof.[13]

Interpretation of the Bible, then, requires a yielded and submissive stance on the part of the believer, rather than one that demands the Bible be bent to fit into a "Common Sense" that in reality reflects

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Christian; Plain Anabaptists would extend this attitude to any Christian reader.

[12] A Devoted Christian's Prayer Book, 55. This is a translation from Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht. The German seems to lay greater stress on putting life in order (*richten* is used twice) according to God's Word.

[13] Martyr's Mirror, 382.

only the assumptions of a pseudo-Christian society. This confession goes on to state that the Old Testament must be "expounded and reconciled" with the New.[14] This reflects an important departure of early Anabaptism from the magisterial church ethic still assumed by many conservative Evangelicals today. The Anabaptists considered it unwarranted and unjustified to

> cast aside clear New Testament directives in order to return to the preparatory Old Testament to find justification for such non-Christian practices as the state church, infant baptism, participation in warfare, and the use of force or bloodshed in matters of conscience.[15]

To the extent that some conservative Evangelicals have developed strong personal ethics, they find support in Plain circles; but to the extent that they base their interpretation of the Bible on the assumptions of modern rationalism and Protestant ethics, their beliefs are held to be inconsistent with an earnest, entire obedience to Christ.

This being said, the tendency toward acculturation can also be a factor in Plain church missions. Sometimes those who are drawn to the mission field are those who have a deep understanding of and appreciation for their sectarian heritage, but sometimes they are people who are so attracted by Evangelicalism that they fail to see the danger in its assumptions about faith and life. Evangelical re-

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[14] Ibid.

[15] J.C. Wenger, God's Word Written, 60.

vivals, with their strong emphasis on the emotional aspects of conversion, can be appealing to those who are frustrated by having to submit their opinions and emotions to doctrines or traditions they may not understand. Evangelical ministries, publications, curricula and media are attractively packaged, and appear sophisticated next to the offerings of Plain groups. They also appear innocent to people who are prosperous and tend to take other Christians at their word, and whose infrequent experiences of conflict with secular cultures pit them not against Evangelicals but against those of whom Evangelicals tend to complain.

This leads to something of a paradox: while most Americans see Evangelicals as strict and sectarian and sometimes dangerous in their political ambitions, a few Plain people see them as holding the key to freedom from traditions that feel stuffy and irrelevant. The situation is further complicated by a possible perception of modern Evangelicalism as somewhat monolithic. Evangelicalism, even conservative Evangelicalism, is remarkably diverse and complex, and while some Plain people drift toward the Evangelical mainstream, some disillusioned Evangelicals, fed up with what they feel to be a divorce between faith and practice, are finding their way into Plain churches. The lengths to which they sometimes go to seek out Plain fellowship can be great. I know of one couple that simply took off driving in a general direction hoping to "find Mennonites." It is not unusual for such families to drive some distance (two or three

hours) to attend Plain churches for a number of years before joining and moving closer in. Some react strongly to the drift they find there:

> Probably the greatest number of converts flunk out because they get into the rut of "one-upsmanship." This means that they seek acceptance by becoming ultra-conservative. . . They let other members know that they think the church is too worldly. Then they are surprised when others reject them as being too individualistic and self-righteous! They then end up back in the world.[16]

Those to whom this happens may do the church more harm than good in finding and executing its mission. Others can, by God's grace, humble themselves and receive solid discipling from mature members, and are integrated into the life and mission of the congregation. Their presence often serves to slow or re-orient the drift and help others to reconsider the value of their heritage.

The effect of these dynamics on Beachy Amish and other Plain missions remains to be seen. Thus far, most Beachy Amish missions have been able to hold to their vision of complete, Scriptural discipleship. The emphases of nonconformity and nonresistance have not been lost, and on the mission field, neither has the realization that nonconformity to the standard of one culture necessitates conformity to another, hopefully one rooted in and growing from the standard of whole obedience to the Bible. This is a countercultural imperative, especially in an increasingly postmodern and relativ-

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[16] William McGrath, Christian and Plain, rev. ed. (Carrollton, OH: Amish Mennonite Publications, 1991), 11.

istic world. Whether the Beachy Amish in particular are able to continue living out this imperative or whether they will eventually succumb to the temptations of acculturation, is as yet unknown.

Mainline Anabaptists have in many ways found that their attempts at witnessing without maintaining a clear distinction from the wider culture have significantly altered the witness they bear. In the Second World War, for example, 80% of eligible Church of the Brethren men went into regular combatant military service. The Brethren were somewhat ahead of the Mennonites in cultural assimilation, having transformed themselves into a modern, mainline denomination mostly between 1920 and 1950.[17] This has significantly affected the "peace witness" of the Brethren, who continue to embrace pacifism at an official, denominational level. William McGrath, who journeyed from the Mennonites to the Beachy Amish, claims that

> Mennonites whose identity largely consists in their good cooking recipes and a vague belief in pacifism, have degenerated far from the original Anabaptist faith. They are committing theological suicide and their descendants melt away into the unbelieving world.[18]

Many Mennonite scholars are aware of this trend. In 1944, Harold Bender's seminal work, The Anabaptist Vision, articulated the Anabaptist concept of discipleship in ways that were palatable to modern students and kept many within the Anabaptist fold that might

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[17] Carl Bowman, Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a "Peculiar People" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 467.

[18] W. McGrath, Conservative Anabaptist Theology, 16.

otherwise have left. Yet, today some of these same students now sometimes find that their own students have lost "a sense of personal faith and identification with the Gospel of Jesus Christ" which results in "a paralysis of commitment and creates a cynical, detached attitude."[19] Having embraced Bender's Vision as an academically relevant alternative to their "formative experiences with revivalism and fundamentalist teaching,"[20] but not necessarily with the Plain Anabaptism of their ancestors, they now find that their own students no longer find them especially relevant. This is no surprise to Plain people, who question the relevance of anything requiring a separate, professional class of Anabaptist religious scholars. Now that "parts of the rest of society are moving from modernity to postmodernity, the main agenda for Mennonites is the move from tradition to modernity."[21] Reversing this trend among the Mennonite mainline is "likely impossible," and steering it is at best "difficult but perhaps possible."[22] Plain Christians would question whether "progress" into a fading modernity is inexorable, especially if one has a heritage at hand that gives one a point of leverage in a centerless postmodernity.

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[19] So notes Stephen Dintaman in "The Pastoral Significance of the Anabaptist Vision," Mennonite Quarterly Review 69 (1995): 308, 318.

[20] Ibid., 309.

[21] Ted Koontz, "Mennonites and Postmodernity," Mennonite Quarterly Review 63 (1989): 415.

[22] Ibid., 423.

One could argue that the mainline Mennonite embrace of modernity began with Mennonite involvement in the revivals of the 1800s and that its effect on missions has been drastic:

> Moved by revival, many acculturating Mennonites became convinced that the tradi-tional Mennonite emphasis had become a dead moralistic legalism without an inner experi-ence with Jesus Christ. Reacting against this background, many came then to emphasize the spiritual regeneration which they felt had been lacking in their own heritage and rel-egated to a secondary position an emphasis on following Jesus in every area of life.[23]

This has led to the establishment of mission churches that have been in "almost all essentials" like churches founded by Western evangelical Protestants.[24] As these churches have begun to try to discover a deeper understanding of their Anabaptist heritage, they have run into a formidable obstacle in the still acculturating Mennonites of North America:

> The need for a clear theological identity takes on even greater urgency when we realize that the Mennonite churches in the nonwestern world all live as minorities, and frequently in hostile environments. They want to be prepared to stand in the times of testing that continue to be their lot, and at a time when western Mennonitism is more clearly iden-tifying with the mainstream of the western social, economic and political realities.[25]

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[23] Robert Ramseyer, Mission and the Peace Witness, 118.

[24] Ibid., 115.

[25] Wilbert Shenk, By Faith They Went Out, 118. Shenk goes on to outline ten common themes which he finds in mainline Mennonite missiological writings, some of which would be acceptable to Plain Mennonites.

Whether those Anabaptists that have acculturated to Western society can continue to bear any sort of distinctive witness is not yet clear. The fact that many scholars are aware of a problem does not mean that the problem is solved. It may be that they will be able to influence a genuine Anabaptist revival; or, it may be that efforts to abandon the relatively newfound Christendom of the now respected Anabaptist denominations in favor of reconceiving the Church as the missional body of Christ will themselves be aborted.[26] It may be that too many assumptions would have to be rejected, too many lifestyles changed, too many heresies exposed and abandoned, and too many bureaucratic jobs lost for modern Anabaptists to reclaim their identity as the obedient people of God. It may be, although it would be arrogant to predict it, that the future of the Anabaptist movement lies instead with those sectarian Plain people who never ceased to perceive the continuity of their life with the Remnant of former times.

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[26] As were similar efforts by W. A. Visser t' Hooft and others in the World Council of Churches in the last generation. See W. Shenk, Write the Vision, 51ff and 77ff.

PART THREE: A STUDY OF PLEASANT VIEW CHURCH

CHAPTER 7

PLEASANT VIEW CHURCH AND ITS INTERNAL MISSIONAL INFLUENCES

Introduction to Pleasant View Church

Pleasant View Church is a Beachy Amish congregation located in the largely Amish community in and near Arthur, Illinois. At present there are about 52 families and 135 members, with worship attendance averaging over 150. The church meetinghouse is located in the country. The congregation is relatively youthful, as is typical of Plain Anabaptist congregations, with over half of those attending under the age of thirty, and over a quarter under fifteen. Families with children have four to five on average. As with other Plain groups, children are seen more as an asset than a liability, and restrictive "family planning" is not seen as a priority. Most children remain either within the Beachy Amish or other conservative Mennonite churches when grown. Most women with children stay at home, although other women work in a variety of businesses. Most men are employed in cabinetmaking, construction or agricultural occupations although there is some variation. Like the Old Order Amish, Beachy Amish people tend to have a strong work ethic, and most families appear to be prosperous. The vast majority of members live in the country. Most adults do not have formal education beyond high school and their tendency toward self-education is impressive. The

church, together with its sister congregation, Trinity Christian Fellowship, maintains a school with 51 students in first through twelfth grades. Many students elect not to finish high school, and the school is not accredited by the state. A number of families teach their children at home, and a few have sent their children to public school.[1] Youth frequently attend short winter courses at Calvary Bible School or Sharon Mennonite Bible Institute, which offer nonaccredited, discipleship-oriented training in a variety of topics related to the Bible and Christian living.

The congregation maintains a standard of practice that covers much of life. Women wear head coverings and cape dresses, married men wear beards with no mustaches. Automobiles are of single tone and not sporty. Men are not to work at occupations that require them to violate Biblical teachings on nonconformity or nonresistance, or that take too much time away from family duties. Families are to meet together daily for prayer and worship. Certain expectations must be met in courtship and marriage, and marriage to an unbeliever or a divorced person whose spouse is still living is forbidden. Radio and television, with their concomitant influence on the mind, are not allowed. Many households and businesses have internet access, although this is beginning to come into question.[2] In

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[1] The school was founded in 1989, after members felt they could no longer support the Arthur Mennonite School, largely because of its lax dress standards and competitive sports emphasis. In the Arthur area, Amish children were typically educated in public schools until about thirty years ago, when they started their own schools.

[2] Technology is not considered bad in itself, but care must be taken that technology serves people and not the other way around. Consequently, the use of fax machines, two-way radios, farm satellite hookups, and so on, are not seen as problematic.

recent years, there has been some disagreement among members about certain details of the standard, such as the size and style of head coverings, but there does not appear to be much disagreement on the more basic matters of lifestyle and dress that the standard addresses.

The Amish originally came to the Arthur area in the middle 1800s. The Amish Mennonite conflicts of the 1860s brought many families to the area as something of a conservative haven, and Arthur soon became a leading Amish community. The Pleasant View Church was organized in 1958, when seven families, including three ministers, left the Old Order out of concern about wild living among Old Order youth and a desire for more Biblical study and training. In addition, some were attracted by the Beachy Amish emphasis on missions that was beginning to emerge in the 1950s. Several members have been involved in mission work, either as overseas missionaries, as conscientious objectors, or in voluntary service. Even today it is common for youth from the church to give a year or two, or sometimes more, of their lives in voluntary service. Over the next twenty-five years, growth was steady, as more members came from the Old Order and families grew within the fellowship.

The group faced opposition from the Old Order, and many original members were placed under the ban for leaving. This has continued throughout the congregation's history. The Old Order Amish see church membership as something to which one can be admitted, and from which one can be released, only by counsel of the congregation. When those who join the Beachy church are banned by their home con-

gregation, every effort is made at making peace and resolving the situation. Usually, once the family becomes established in the Beachy congregation, the ban is lifted.[3] One reason for Old Order opposition is the perception that people join Beachy churches so that they can have modern conveniences like electricity and automobiles. While this may be partly true, Beachy Amish can counter that much is expected of those who join their fellowship: one is expected to be in church once or twice a week, rather than every other week (as is the Old Order practice) and must testify not only to a new birth experience but to freedom from tobacco, alcohol and immorality. Sins must be confessed and restitution made to the greatest extent possible. Men must be willing to give devotional sermons in turn and topics by request. No one is admitted to membership without a six-month trial period. With the additional possibility of being placed in the ban for joining the Beachy fellowship, the cost to those who would do so for the sake of convenience sake is high.[4]

The Pleasant View Church experienced division in 1981. It had grown to a size where forming another congregation was advisable (about fifty families), and there was intention of starting an outreach, but inner conflicts led to schism, and several families left under less than friendly circumstances to form Trinity Christian Fellowship. The Trinity group requested a three-member committee of

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[3] Deacon Menno Kuhns of Trinity Christian Fellowship, interviewed by author, 20 December 2000, near Cadwell, Illinois.

[4] For a list of similar requirements among Indiana Beachy Amish congregations, see Stephen Yoder, My Beloved Brethren, 204-205.

bishops to investigate the split, and after confession was made between parties, reconciliation could begin. Today, the congregations operate a school together, share a joint youth group, exchange ministers often and attend each other's special programs. Trinity has about twenty families, with most growth coming from within and from the Old Order. Pleasant View, meanwhile, is again to the size at which some are pondering whether forming another congregation might be a good idea.[5]

Pleasant View is led by four ministers, each ordained by lot and serving without compensation. The bishop is Howard Kuhns; he is 49 years of age and was ordained bishop in 1986, having been first ordained a minister in 1980. Howard manages a farm implement dealership, is married, and has eight children ranging in age from eight to twenty-seven. The deacon is Duane Kuhns. He is thirty-seven and married, without children. He sells cabinets for an Old-Order-owned business. Duane does a lot of counseling and oversees the needs of the poor and the sick. He was ordained in 1996, when minister Willis Bontrager, who had been given deacon responsibilities, accepted a missionary assignment in Romania. A 51 year-old farmer, Willis has since returned with his wife and five children, aged twelve to twenty-six. He was first ordained in 1981. He also serves one day a week as school principal. Mervin Helmuth was ordained minister in 1992. He is forty-four years of age and works as an electrician. He is married and has four children aged thirteen to twenty-two. Mervin

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[5] The motivation here may be more than pure evangelism. The Old Order Amish are also growing steadily and rapidly, and land and houses in and around Arthur are becoming more expensive.

converted from the Old Order. The other ministers were brought to Pleasant View as children. The ministers alternate preaching responsibilities.

This chapter and the one following will explore the missional vision of the Pleasant View Church and how this vision is developed within the congregation. Pleasant View is sometimes seen as something of a way station for Old Order Amish who are drifting out of Amish culture. This is true to a point, and is disturbing to many. However, this view makes assumptions about the wider culture that are increasingly untenable in a postmodern world and ignores the drive among committed members toward complete obedience to the Bible. While Pleasant View's primary mission context is the Arthur community, and specifically the Amish community, several influences within and without the congregation have challenged the church to mission outside that context.

Missional Influences within the Congregation

The missional vision of a church is its basic, governing purpose, the motivating factor that drives all other factors in its life and witness in the world. As earlier discussed, the basic missional vision of Plain Anabaptist congregations is complete obedience to the Word of God in all of life. Pleasant View is no exception. The witness of the congregation in the world cannot be divorced from its life; rather, its life produces its witness. Sometimes it does so through organized missionary efforts, but often the most effective witness takes place in the ordinary activities of life, especially in the ethical standards and communal identity of

members as they go about their daily tasks. There is a strong sense among Plain Anabaptists that, as one Pleasant View member put it, "We don't change much between Sunday and the rest of the week." The purpose of this section is to discuss how such congregational vision is developed, influenced and carried out within the congregation.

Missionary Program

Members at Pleasant View do have a strong commitment to organized missionary endeavor. At present there are eight veterans of long term missions, about twenty with past or present involvement in voluntary service or civilian public service, and two currently serving in prison missions in Alabama. The influence of these people and their mission experiences is profound. While few have had experience with church planting missions, their experience has exposed them to persons of non-Amish, non-Mennonite and even non-Christian background, and has often challenged them to a witness broader than their own heritage. Minister Willis Bontrager, for example, spent three years in Suceava, Romania. His family learned to speak Romanian and was immersed in the life of the Romanian Pentecostals with whom they worked. The congregation has since been blessed with several Romanian-American visitors, and one Romanian coworker from Suceava married Matthew Bontrager, Willis' oldest son.

Members are also active in local mission support efforts, such as helping to prepare clothing for shipment to Romania and participating in a large annual relief auction for work in Haiti. Some members participated in the Fresh Air programs that brought inner-city children to rural areas in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and one family

has hosted a succession of foster children in their home; neither program is currently in practice among members today. Church members participate in regular nursing home services and prison ministry and give generous prayer and financial support to a variety of mission programs.

While Pleasant View's involvement in organized mission may be impressive for a congregation of its size, its missionary effort and missional vision are not the same. Organized missionary effort in a Plain Anabaptist setting is a product of the core missional vision of a fellowship obedient to the Bible, not the other way around. With no core vision, the congregation would find itself supporting a variety of programs without discernment. With the core vision, the congregation's organized efforts are only a part of its missional endeavor, for "mission is the natural outgrowth of a healthy brotherhood that loves each other fervently."[6]

Life Witness

It is in the realm of everyday life that the greater part of Pleasant View's missional vision is developed and lived out. The consistent pattern of life common to Plain Churches appears to govern the life of members to a remarkable degree. Witness to outsiders often consists in their encounter with this life pattern. Initially, outsiders are aware of several outward expressions of communal identity. The women's head coverings and dresses and the men's beards or clothing, for example, reflect not only Biblical

[6] Willis Bontrager, remarks made in adult Bible study, 14 March 2001, at Pleasant View Church, Arcola, Illinois.

principles of obedience, modesty and meekness, but a determination that style is to be chosen by the fellowship rather than by the fashions of wider culture.[7] Outward nonconformity often draws questions about Amish Mennonite beliefs and practices, and this may provide opportunity for witness and further interaction. Plain people may be slow to trust those whose interest in them is superficial and unrelated to the Biblical principles they seek to live out. They are cautioned not to "waste a lot of time with those who are obviously insincere," but should "never shy away from conversing with sincere seekers."[8] Those who are sincere may find themselves drawn to a life that at first glance seems surreal. Here they find a people among whom divorce is very rare and remarriage after divorce is not done, among whom very high priority is given to family stability and children's spiritual development, and among whom television, radio, and the pervasive influence of the entertainment industry are absent. They find a people among whom hard work is considered a blessing, an opportunity to provide for one's family and to love one's neighbor, and even to bear witness of the Gospel. They also find a people among whom the "big stories" as defined by the

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[7] Youth do not always see it this way, and sometimes rebel to varying degrees. The subtle rebellion known among Plain churches as "drift" is difficult to see from the outside.

[8] Publication Board of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Ambassadors for Christ (Lititz, PA: Eastern Mennonite Publications, 1991), 18-19.

media outlets of the world are secondary to a sick or injured neighbor, and among whom the power politics of government are eschewed in favor of preparation for the judgement of God.

The life pattern that expresses Pleasant View's vision is marked by yieldedness toward God and ethical consistency. Of sermons preached in 1999 and 2000, a vast majority (78%) dealt with these two themes, as did a majority of the topics and devotionals generally given by laymen (73%). In the worship of the church, these themes are seen in the practice of lot ordination and the importance of lay persons in daily administrative leadership, devotionals, topics, teaching and missionary involvement. They are seen in the continuing practice of the Holy Kiss. They are also seen in the practice of close communion, in which twice yearly members partake of bread and cup and wash one another's feet. Communion is preceded by a council meeting, in which members confess their faults and their desire to commune and in which the ministers assess the unity of the church. Members who feel they are in doubt or who are not in unity with their brothers and sisters, do not take communion. It is more respected to refrain than to partake hypocritically, especially when there is a desire expressed to be able to partake in the future. The pattern of yieldedness and ethical consistency is fractal in nature. It pervades all areas of life and its structure can be seen in the homes, school and work of Pleasant View members. Through this pattern their missional vision is developed, expressed, and lived out.

Home Life

The home, especially the nuclear family, is the basic unit of social organization at Pleasant View. Its workings are addressed in 40% of sermons and over one-fifth of the church standards deal with relations in the home. Within each home, there are clearly understood roles and tasks. Fathers are expected to work to provide for the family and lead in family worship. Mothers have primary responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the house and the care of small children. Children are disciplined strictly, and are expected to take increasing responsibility as they grow; it is not unusual for parents to take on extra projects so that their children will have constructive work to do. While a number of men with families work for other employers (15%), most either operate a family business (37%), farm (34%), or manage a balance between farming, business and employment (15%) that allows older children an opportunity for work. Work is tempered by devotion. It is a means to serve God and neighbor, not an end in itself.

Work may train children for physical labor, but it is more important to train them for the Kingdom of God, and this is done largely through the practice of daily family prayer and devotions. This is a very sensitive area of life for members at Pleasant View, and many do not feel it is the place of academic research to examine it. I discovered this when I distributed a questionnaire on spiritual disciplines to members in December, 2000. The response rate was very poor (I got back 13 of 100). I was informed by one of the ministers that considerable offense had been taken and that he felt

that some of those offended may have fallen short in that area.[9] Of those who returned the survey, almost all (12 of 13) reported that they maintain the practice of daily family worship, and most (11 of 13) that they pray daily with their spouse. It is interesting to note that of those who were raised among the Beachy Amish, most experienced daily family worship as children (5 of 7), while those who were raised in the Old Order did not (0 of 6). The influence of daily family worship and the example of praying parents can be profound, providing training for discipleship and leadership and instilling in children a vision for service, witness and intercession from an early age. Daily individual prayer was also a key discipline practiced by most (10 of 13). Spiritual devotion and a strong work ethic are, hopefully, marked by moral purity and genuine love. While premarital sexual intercourse is not uncommon among unbaptized youth of the Old Order Amish, Beachy Amish youth are held to a relatively strict standard of courtship that minimizes physical contact and emphasizes spiritual preparation for a lifelong marriage. Divorce, as noted above, is rare; remarriage after divorce is not allowed if one's former spouse is still living.[10] Children are punished by spanking, but one would be hard pressed to make the claim that these people are especially violent when compared with any other segment of Western society. The home is rather seen as a refuge, and chil-

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[9] Since it is a purpose of this study not to attempt to influence or prescribe to the congregation, I took no further steps with the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

[10] This is also true among the Old Order Amish.

dren are an asset rather than a liability. It is the burden of parents to create a genuinely loving atmosphere at home that, over time, will undergird rather than frustrate or stifle their children.

It may seem impossible to cynical Americans that people in the twenty-first century can live like this. While what I have described appears to be the norm at Pleasant View, hypocrisy is not entirely unknown here. Hypocrisy is especially pernicious in the home. It is possible for an individual or a family to "go through the motions" without any sincere devotion to Christ: they are relatively peaceful motions and yield a stable life that many modernists and post-modernists would envy. Superficiality can be difficult to detect and correct and is a temptation for any sincere Christian, but there are occasional instances of darker hypocrisy than this. Suicide, physical and sexual abuse, and emotional and mental dysfunction are not completely unknown among the Plain churches or even among the Beachy Amish, although I am not aware of any such cases at Pleasant View. I see no reason to believe that the incidence of such things is higher among the Plain people than in any other social group. These problems were not uncommon within the mainline Anabaptist congregations of which I was once pastor, nor are they rare in the general population. What disturbs many Plain Christians is the possibility that such gross sins might be glossed over to protect family status, thus making a mockery of Christian faith, as well as of a lifestyle that should bring joy and stability. Plain churches do have structures to provide for discipline and redemption. These include, among others, brotherly exhortation and counsel from the

ministry, residential programs and the Ban if necessary. Overall, the pattern of love, yieldedness and consistency appears to represent the actual home life of members at Pleasant View.

Education of Children

The Pleasant View School, operated by the congregation in conjunction with Trinity Christian Fellowship nearby, also plays a role in developing vision. The school was founded in 1989 as a split from the Arthur Mennonite School, which was in turn founded a generation earlier in conjunction with Conservative Conference Mennonites in the area. Before that, members had sent their children to public school, as had Old Order Amish and Conservative Mennonites in the area. The motivation for founding and maintaining separate Christian schools was both reactive and proactive. On one hand, public schools in the 1950s and 1960s were becoming less tolerant of many conservative Christian beliefs, and by the 1970s many churches were founding schools of their own. It was felt that children needed to be protected from the influence of teachers, curricula and peers whose values were inimical to the New Testament. The increasing secularization of the wider culture led many to conclude that the state could no longer be trusted with their children. The Pleasant View and Trinity churches felt it necessary to separate further from the Arthur Mennonite School over the latter's emphasis on competitive sports and tolerance of more lax dress standards. The non-Mennonite evangelical curriculum used at Arthur Mennonite was kept because it was easy to use, well-organized, and had a high view of the Bible. Although it does not present an Anabaptist view of his-

tory and ethics, these are taught in Bible and Church History classes given by church members. There has been some discussion of changing to a conservative Mennonite curriculum that has recently changed its format in a way that could serve the school's needs.

Conversely, the push toward educating children within the church setting has also been proactive. If there is a desire to shield children from values inimical to the Bible, it is only logical for parents to want their children taught values that are in line with the Bible. The curricula used at Pleasant View School put a strong emphasis on diligence and student responsibility. A portion of each school day is set aside for devotions and prayer. There is a fairly strong program of Bible knowledge and memory. Perhaps the most important factor in developing vision among the children, however, is the vision and faith of their three main teachers. Teaching as a career is similar to foreign missions or voluntary service; the pay is rather low and the turnover high. At present, Pleasant View's teachers have a passion for the spiritual development of their students. One stated that "the most important thing is that they have a personal relationship with God: to know Him, to know Jesus." Another expressed a desire that "they know God personally, not just way out there," and that students learn to grow continually and "not to come to a point where we can relax" as Christians. It may be that at times teachers have been otherwise, but the teachers I interviewed state a clear commitment to Plain Anabaptist beliefs and a desire that those beliefs be cultivated in

their students. One teacher even expressed some concern over books in the school library that could be interpreted to support militarism or romantic fantasy.

The desire of teachers and the support of parents do not guarantee that students will adopt the vision that is presented to them. Children in any school become part of a peer group, and that group often becomes formative in their sense of identity and purpose. A number of parents at Pleasant View and Trinity have chosen homeschooling in recent years, largely in recognition of this dynamic.[11] Homeschoolers feel that the responsibility to raise children in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4) is intended for parents rather than school boards, and feel their own responsibility strongly. One stated, "It's a heart thing." Several homeschoolers with whom I spoke reported an inner struggle with their own feelings and motives, a concern that they carry out this responsibility without giving in to the temptation to think they are better than other families. The combination of this inward struggle and the clear belief that they are following God's leading in choosing home education has led to a positive relationship between homeschoolers and the rest of the church. Homeschoolers help to support the school, and frequently use the school building for gatherings. They are often active in teaching Sunday School and providing leadership in the church. One homeschooling family serves as host for one of

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[11] On the whole, interviews with homeschooling parents revealed that the peer-group dynamic was decisive in their commitment to homeschool. Ironically, the school's choice of a non-Anabaptist curriculum was not a major issue. In fact most, although not all, homeschoolers also use a non-Anabaptist curriculum.

the school's teachers. Another family spends its summer Wednesday afternoons in "missions," doing some work of service for an elderly or poor person in the community and then bringing them supper and visiting in the evening. The long term effect of homeschooling on the vision of the church has yet to be seen, but at Pleasant View, the pattern of isolation and alienation felt by homeschoolers in other church settings does not appear to be present.[12]

The Workplace

If the congregation's missional vision is developed in the home and school, integrity requires that it be expressed and maintained in the workplace. It is in the workplace where members most often come into contact with the world and with Christians seeking a deeper level of discipleship. The workplace is the clearest expression of the "church scattered," and members' conduct in it can mean the difference between a congregation of people devoted to whole-life obedience and one that lives in a hypocritical dream world. Like most other Plain Christians, Pleasant View members recognize that not all occupations are conducive to consistent Christian witness. Some examples of employment that members consider inappropriate are government jobs that require the use of state coercion, jobs that keep a worker in an unequal and coercive yoke with unbelieving employers or fellow workers, executive jobs that take priority over faith and family, or other vocations that subject a

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[12] I am thinking especially of those in non-Plain churches; there have been reports of conflict in other Plain churches over this issue.

worker to undue temptation or stress.[13] Plain people seek to avoid industrial strife. Anabaptists in the sixteenth century were excluded from trade guilds because they refused to swear oaths. Plain people today avoid labor unions and also industrial associations that use such tools as lockouts and blacklists, as both are part of the "worldly system" inimical to their beliefs about work.[14] Members at Pleasant View tend to choose occupations that allow them to live out their values consistently. Of household heads listing primary occupations in 1999, 31% were farmers, 15% worked in cabinetry, 12% were involved in the sale, manufacture or service of farm implements, 8% worked in small factories, 8% worked in construction, and 13% worked in a variety of other trades, including electrician, taxi driver, truck driver, blacksmith, auto mechanic and butcher. Another 10% were widows, and one household head is in full-time prison missions in Alabama.[15]

Members appear, on the whole, to possess a very strong work ethic. On the whole, it appears that they enjoy the act of working. Businessmen within the congregation whom I interviewed each employ a number of non-Amish, non-Mennonite people but attempt to provide a Christian atmosphere marked by honesty, fairness, and application of

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[13] This is not to say that members make pronouncements against these jobs, only that they are held to be inconsistent with the pattern of life that they embrace.

[14] On unions see 1001 Questions and Answers on the Christian Life (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishers, 1992), 160-161.

[15] These figures are derived from listings in D. Miller, ed., Amish Mennonite Directory 2000: United States and Canada (Millersburg, OH: Abana Books, 2000), 311-315.

the Golden Rule with employees. They admitted to a few employee problems, usually with non-Mennonite workers and usually involving accidents, absenteeism and problems in personal life. All noted that they have a low employee turnover. Problems tend to be dealt with by gentle admonition and advice, sometimes counseling (with the employer, not a secular professional), and prayer. Employers and employees both take work seriously, but as a means to an end. That end is not leisure or even wealth, but faithfulness to the Christian pattern of life to which they subscribe.

Summary

All of this is not to claim that Pleasant View members are without inconsistency. From the outside it appears that these people are remarkable in their faithfulness, but variations from the pattern of yieldedness and consistency are not altogether uncommon. Members are often tempted, for example, to overlook a government regulation here or to make a questionable purchase there. While daily family devotions and prayer may be practiced among those willing to discuss such things, it may be that others struggle in that area. The congregation's standard of dress is often violated to small degrees by some who feel some need to "push the envelope" of church authority, but such rebellion presupposes an envelope against which to push and is not discernible without it. It is necessarily true that no one at Pleasant View or anywhere else follows perfectly the vision of total and consistent obedience to Christ, but it is also true that this is the goal around which life at Pleasant View is structured. On the whole, members seem to hold this goal honestly

rather than such petty goals as ambition, wealth, power and prestige. It would be unacceptable to most Pleasant View members to claim that they themselves, because of their heritage or upbringing, are better than other Christians or other people. For some, it is difficult to see how disparate their own norms are from those of the world or the wider church. To others, especially, I believe, to those entrusted with leadership, the goal of complete Christian consistency and submission remains the driving motivation for their own lives, and for the mission of the church.

CHAPTER 8

INFLUENCES ON MISSIONAL VISION FROM OUTSIDE THE CONGREGATION

Almost from its inception, the Beachy Amish fellowship of churches has embraced congregations with differing attitudes toward missions, evangelism and identity. When their missionary involvement began to accelerate after 1950, the thirteen congregations then in the fellowship "were not at the same place . . . in respect to engaging in relief and mission work."[1] These differences have remained. Some churches have a more inward focus. Typically, these tend to use the German language and hold to standards somewhat like those of the Old Order. Others, such as Pleasant View, maintain a high degree of extracongregational and missionary involvement. For them, missionary experience has had a strong, defining influence.

Outside influence on missional vision at Pleasant View can be divided into at least six areas. Four of these are intentional, representing the congregation's desire to seek opportunities for spiritual growth and missionary outreach.[2] Members participate in pro-

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[1] E.S. Yoder, The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches, 212.

[2] Additional information about many of the ministries mentioned here can be found in Appendix 2.

grams and ministries that have Beachy Amish, Plain Mennonite, other Mennonite or Evangelical sponsorship. Two more areas of influence reflect the church's social and geographical context.

Beachy Amish Influences

The first, and perhaps most important, source of outside influence for Pleasant View is found in the many ministries and programs under direct Beachy Amish sponsorship. In the area of spiritual development of young adults, the Beachy Amish hold yearly regional youth conferences, and many youth participate in Calvary Bible School in Arkansas, which offers non-accredited, discipleship-oriented courses in three-week terms during the winter months. Calvary Bible School courses are generally led by Beachy Amish ministers, and Pleasant View ministers have been represented. While students are encouraged to study and reflect, the liberalizing influence common to most post-secondary education is not seen here. Much effort is made to ensure an environment conducive to serious spiritual reflection and prayer. The experience has a very powerful effect on many of the youth who attend, and many come away with a deeper appreciation of their heritage. Youth are also encouraged toward and formed by the experience of voluntary service in several ministries of the fellowship, especially the Faith Mission Home for the mentally handicapped in Virginia and the Hillcrest nursing home in Arkansas.

Beyond the spiritual development of young adults, the Beachy Amish also have ministries aimed at challenging other adult members. The Calvary Messenger serves as something of a nerve center for news, opinion and inspiration within the fellowship. In addition, many members make use of Beside the Still Waters, a daily devotional guide written by laymen from the Beachy Amish and other Plain churches. Ministers are also inspired and challenged by annual meetings for ministers from all over the denomination. Sermons, topical discussions and notes from these meetings are often circulated for inspiration among the general membership.

In the area of international relief and evangelism, the Beachy Amish have four of their own mission organizations besides cooperating in others. Amish Mennonite Aid and the Mission Interest Committee, both founded in the 1950s, have administered many relief programs and planted numerous churches around the world. Christian Mission Charities, founded in 1972, focuses on distribution of Bibles, Christian literature, clothing, food and medicines, and supports orphanages in four countries. Its initial focus was on helping believers behind the Iron Curtain. Christian Mission Charities works largely with unregistered Baptist churches facing stiff Orthodox and Muslim opposition in the former Soviet Union. Master's International Ministries has planted a church and operates clinics in Kiev and some other Ukrainian villages as well as distributing tons of garden seed to needy urbanites. The influence of people working with these and similar organizations is pervasive among the Beachy Amish. Locally, church member Dorothy Kuhns spent

thirteen years as a nurse in Belize. Her step-granddaughter Brenda Kuhns devoted seven years to Faith Mission Home. Minister Willis Bontrager and his family directed an orphanage in Romania under the auspices of Christian Aid Ministries for three years, and Allen Miller and family served with Northern Youth Programs in northern Ontario for nine years. The Beachy Amish as a denominational fellowship are quite close-knit as well, and within the last five or six years have been experiencing some of the implications of their Anabaptist view of missions directly. For example, one missionary was kidnapped and subsequently released by an intoxicated terrorist gang in El Salvador in the mid-1990s. In late 2000, several mission workers in Kenya were beaten by angry mobs. In the spring of 2001, a missionary in Belize was apparently murdered. It may be that in some of these cases missionaries were too trusting or naive, but in each case their witness has continued and the churches are becoming stronger.

Cooperative Ventures with Other Plain Groups

In addition to those under direct Beachy Amish sponsorship, Pleasant View has actively supported a number of ministries that are cooperative efforts involving other Plain groups. Plain churches are able, partly because of their congregational polity and partly because of their attitude of yieldedness toward God and one another, to maintain their separatist identity while engaging in mission alongside others of similar convictions. The Beachy Amish Mission Interest Committee, for example, began among mission-minded members

of the Old Order. The Beachy Amish continue to work with other Amish groups as well as with Old German Baptist Brethren, the Midwest Mennonite Fellowship, and other conservative Mennonite groups. Some such cooperative efforts promote spiritual growth among youth. The Sharon Mennonite Bible Institute of Pennsylvania, for example, offers numerous discipleship-oriented courses similar to those of Calvary Bible School but on a semester calendar. Faith Builders Educational Programs of Pennsylvania are designed in part for training teachers in Christian schools, while Fresh Start Chapel in Indiana provides intensive residential rehabilitation for men with serious emotional and other problems. Members frequently participate in a wide variety of retreats offered by such organizations as Deeper Life Ministries of Ohio and the Penn Valley Retreat Center. There are voluntary service opportunities in such ministries, and also opportunities to serve in cooperative missionary endeavors. Christian Aid Ministries, which involves a variety of Plain groups, works primarily in relief but is also involved in evangelism and literature distribution. Northern Youth Programs works in family, youth and prison ministries among natives in northern Canada. Mexico Mennonite Aid is a cooperative venture with the Old Order Amish. Publishers of Christian literature supported by the congregation include, among others, Christian Light Publishing, Lamp and Light Publishers, and the Christian Printing Mission. Many members also subscribe to The Budget, a weekly newspaper full of personal accounts from Amish and Mennonite congregations around the world.

On a local level, members cooperate extensively with Conservative Conference Mennonites and the Old Order Amish in relief programs at the Otto Center. The Otto Center, a large, privately-owned facility operated cooperatively by local Amish and Mennonites, stores clothing for shipment to the needy overseas, serves as gathering place for large church groups and family reunions, houses a medical clinic operated by a Champaign hospital and is used for a variety of other events. Members also cooperate in the annual Haiti benefit auction, in church services at a local nursing home and prison ministry at a large prison across the state, and in a variety of small scale acts of charity.

The lines between those ministries under direct Beachy Amish sponsorship and those that are cooperative with other groups are somewhat blurred. These missions and ministries cooperate extensively with one another, and the roles of the various governing bodies tend to be eclipsed by the tasks at hand. Differences between Plain groups also tend to be eclipsed by the stark differences between Plain groups and the rest of Western culture.

Other Mennonites

The influence of mainline, non-Plain Mennonites is somewhat less pronounced at Pleasant View. There is a large degree of cooperation with conservative evangelical Mennonites, such as might be found in the Conservative Mennonite Conference.[3] Pleasant View

[3] The Conservative Conference churches in the Arthur area appear to be toward the traditional end of the spectrum within their denomination. The majority of their membership is descended from the Beachy and Old Order Amish.

members actively support, for example, the Gospel Echoes Prison Ministry team, and one older couple, Joe and Mary Yoder, are serving in Alabama with We Care Prison Ministries. One member, Mel Yoder, is an agent for Choice Books, which is cosponsored by mainline Mennonites and tends toward evangelical values. There are occasional speakers in the community from the Mennonite Central Committee. The recent exhibit of Mirror of the Martyrs, an offering of Mennonite academia featuring stories and engravings from the Martyrs Mirror and relating them to recent and present persecution of democracy and human rights activists in third-world nations, has been on extended display at the Otto Center. It has had mixed reviews among local Beachy Amish. They appreciate the historical accounts and engravings from a book many have in their own homes and read occasionally, but the examples of recent martyrdom in the exhibit are of persons who suffer in the cause of human rights and liberal democracy and not necessarily the cause of Christ. Church members are personally acquainted with Beachy Amish persons who have experienced serious persecution and even death for the Gospel they preach and the lifestyle they live. They are also familiar with the plight of separatist Evangelical Christians in Muslim and Eastern Orthodox lands, with whom they cooperate in mission, and do not feel that suffering for even noble political causes should be considered equivalent to suffering directly for Jesus' sake.

As noted above, the congregation cooperates extensively with other Plain Anabaptist groups. They are especially influenced by

books and publications from conservative Mennonite publishers. Several members have books on theological or ethical subjects from mainline Mennonite writers, mostly from a generation or two ago, but these do not appear to be as influential as books by Plain, conservative Mennonite or Evangelical authors. There is a perception that mainline Mennonites have abandoned their heritage for a perceived relevance to modern secular culture and that they have thereby lost relevance to those who would lead a lifestyle based on whole-life obedience to Christ. While other Evangelicals seem increasingly sympathetic to Beachy Amish values, the perception is that mainline, liberal Mennonites and Brethren are less and less so. Overall, the congregation's relationship to the mainline Mennonite Church appears to be tangential.

Evangelicals

Pleasant View's concept of missions is thus also influenced by non-Anabaptist Evangelical thought. Educational curricula for children are taken mostly from Evangelical sources, with some adaptation. Of books listed as personally influential by members responding to a questionnaire on spiritual disciplines in December 2000, half appeared to be from Evangelical and half from Anabaptist sources. Books by Evangelical authors are most common on the shelves of members we have visited and many use Evangelical Bible study materials. The Daily Bread devotional guide is used by several members, and some subscribe to conservative Evangelical publications such as World magazine. There is also some support for Evangelical

ministries such as Voice of the Martyrs, which publicizes the plight of Christians in lands where Christianity is persecuted or restricted.

From the outside, it may appear that members are prone to accept uncritically the political or philosophical biases of their Evangelical sources and to some degree this may be true. They certainly seem to favor them over the political and philosophical biases of liberal Protestantism or the secular media. At this time, however, it appears that their reading of Evangelical sources is balanced by their experience and heritage as Plain Anabaptists. Members may sympathize with those who oppose abortion, for example, but are not about to engage in political protest that can be construed as coercive. Likewise, members may feel that President Clinton behaved shamefully and dishonestly in the affairs that brought about his impeachment; but they did not campaign or (as far as is known) vote for his opponent, or engage in outward protest on the matter. Members are not about to adopt the dress, ethics, or Calvinist theology common to Evangelical political conservatives. Even if they feel more comfortable with conservatives than with liberals, both represent factions in the kingdom of this world rather than the Kingdom of God.

To a certain extent, members seek the influence of Beachy Amish, Plain Anabaptist, mainline Anabaptist, and Evangelical sources out of a conscious desire to develop and carry out the mission they believe God has given them in the world, rather than

simply reflecting the social context in which they live. Their social context is not without influence, however, on their views of the world and their place in it. Specifically, Pleasant View members are strongly, if not intentionally, influenced by their life in the rural midwestern United States, and by their traditionalist Old Order Amish background and context.

The Rural Midwest

Pleasant View is located in a downstate Illinois farming community, and thus its members seem to embrace many of the values common to midwestern rural culture. They spend time reading the Bible and Christian literature, but they also read their local newspapers, secular news magazines, and business and farm publications. By and large, the Beachy Amish eschew participation in governmental politics, but they do discuss such politics frequently, and when they do the tone of discussion is similar to that of other midwestern, rural, religious conservatives. They tend to be concerned with national issues such as religious freedom, abortion and sexual morality, and economic independence from the government, much like other religious conservatives. Issues such as militarism and nationalism would differentiate them from other conservatives. For a generation prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on New York and Washington, these issues were rarely considered. Within recent months, nonresistance has again become a defining belief at Pleasant View. It may also be worth noting that, while several members hunt with firearms or use them to protect their livestock and

gardens from predators and pests, Second Amendment issues do not appear to be the "hot topic" that they are among other rural conservatives. For Pleasant View members local problems, such as zoning ordinances and water hemp, tend to take priority over national ones, and issues arising among their churches, neighborhoods and families are more important than those coming from the national media. While much of their thinking is influenced by their rural surroundings, it is not determined by them. As with their Evangelical sources, members still try to read their news through the grid of their Anabaptist understandings, rather than jump uncritically into their surrounding world.

The Old Order Amish

Of greater importance to the world view of Pleasant View members is their emergence from the Old Order Amish. Almost all members are of Beachy or Old Order background, and most who are of Beachy upbringing are within three generations of their Old Order roots. This colors much of what members say and do and raises a very sensitive constellation of issues. Most members refer to themselves as Mennonites, not Amish, reserving the latter term for the Old Order. Their clothing, homes, and vehicles are Plain, but clearly not of the Old Order.

Clothing is a delicate issue, both for adults seeking out a common standard of dress, and for youth who "push the envelope" of that standard. This leads to phenomena that would seem odd to outsiders. For example, young women will often make their plain cape

dresses with shiny or sculpted fabric and gaudy buttons, and young men will mousse their hair or wear slightly fashionable clothing. In a recent congregational discussion of a proposal to allow men to adapt store-bought suit coats with buttons (by making them into straight cut plain coats), rather than having hook-and-eye coats made in another state, I heard no mention of the possibility of obtaining suit coats from among the much more numerous Old Order Amish of the area, who wear a slightly different pattern. Another example is that of the loops of white ribbon (called "strings") that hang down in back from the rear corners of most younger sisters' head coverings. Older women do not have the loops but tie their strings in front. It is thought that the presence of the loops will keep the coverings from getting smaller and smaller over time (thus the nickname "snowflake coverings") until they disappear altogether. This is a problem in the more liberal churches of the Conservative Mennonite Conference, where coverings are now optional (in contradiction, the Beachy Amish would claim, to 1 Corinthians 11:1-16) and other signs of nonconformity to Western culture have slipped away.

Members seem painfully aware of the sins that plague the Old Order, such as hypocrisy, premarital sex, smoking, drinking and occultism: these are the besetting sins of "the world" from which they emerged. Sin that plague evangelical Protestant churches are less obvious, belonging to a different frame of reference. The tendency of groups that come out of the Amish to drift, or surge, away from their former identity has been discussed previously. Pleasant

View is not very far along in that process. Enough people seem aware of the temptation to abandon old ways without due reflection, and enough seem to possess a strong desire for purity and submission within their own hearts, that the danger of cultural absorption into the rural midwest, or into Protestant thought, is not immediate. Members may not consider themselves to be Amish, but they continue to retain a relatively strong sense of identity as sectarian, conservative Mennonites, separate and distinct from the world, and they still hold to the values of yieldedness and obedience that mark Plain churches as a whole.

Summary

The outside influences present at Pleasant View carry with them some temptations and a number of opportunities. There is a temptation for any group with a history of isolation to succumb to an inordinate desire for "relevance" in the world, to see outside truth as "objective" and its own heritage as something less. Perhaps a greater temptation is to believe that mission outside the local congregation is somehow more important than that which takes place through it, and thus to give in to the notion that "nothing is going on here" and that therefore one should "go where the action is." The opportunities afforded by Pleasant View's cooperation with other congregations and ministries are many and varied. Pleasant View members tend to be well-read in the affairs of their communities, fellowships and missions. They travel frequently for weddings, funerals, baptisms and ordinations as well as for retreats and

conferences. They receive visitors from around the country frequently. They are more sophisticated than one might expect of people with little post-secondary education. With Beachy Amish congregations on five continents, they are far less provincial than one might think. They are sectarian but not sheltered, separatist but not isolationist. They are clearly not about to conform to Western popular culture, but they are able to function in a variety of cultures.

Voluntary service and missions provide good opportunities to serve outside the immediate local context. The anticipated result is that those who participate become servants and missionaries in whatever local context they find themselves, including their home congregation. Youth who go into voluntary service may do so for educational or personal reasons,[4] but in doing so they seek the Lord's will for their lives. Missionaries return to be active in the congregation, and in many ways lead out in its witness. The congregation is deeply affected by them. They help to provide a balance between intra- and extracongregational influences on the church's vision. It may be that they will also help to meet the missional challenges the congregation is likely to face in the next few years.

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[4] It is not uncommon for people to meet their spouses this way. I once heard a member refer to the Hillcrest home as a "match factory."

PART FOUR: STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER 9

MISSIONAL CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES AT PLEASANT VIEW

Missional Challenges

It is, perhaps, more in line with conventional missiology to give primary attention to target populations and strategies for reaching them than to provide an extensive re-examination of the nature of the Church. In church growth theory, for example, it is noted that effective evangelism is more likely to take place within than across cultural lines, and it is proposed that resources be concentrated in areas where present response is strong.[1] While this has not been a conscious strategy among the Beachy Amish, it does reflect their experience to some extent. Most of their growth, at least in the United States, has come from the Old Order Amish, and where cross-cultural evangelistic efforts have taken hold they have generally been preceded by some expression of interest in a nonconformed, nonresistant witness.[2] This paper has given priority to the church as a fellowship capable of whole-life discipleship, out of which mission flows naturally. Its premise has been that such an

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[1] The classic formulation of this argument is found in Donald McGavran's Understanding Church Growth. McGavran's theories were followed by many of the Church Growth writers of the 1980s.

[2] Daniel Bontrager, interviewed by the author, 23 October 2000.

understanding of the church and its witness calls for a different concept of mission than that of established Protestantism.

This being said, there are certain populations that present a particular challenge to the witness of the Pleasant View church. The dominant of these, as noted above, is the local Old Order Amish community, which numbers approximately 2,500. Pleasant View has been described as a way station for Old Order Amish seeking a tolerable means to escape the restrictions with which they live. This is not entirely true, and it should be noted that the congregation appears to have been very successful in presenting a clear, New Testament gospel and lifestyle in this context. Not only have they attracted members from the community, but they have been a positive example and perhaps an influence toward revival among some segments of the Old Order.

Pleasant View can also serve as an example for other Plain groups. Pleasant View ministers have frequently preached at a small, independent conservative Mennonite church near Mt. Vernon, Illinois, and members from that group have come to Pleasant View to visit. On one occasion, a family of Romanian Pentecostals from Detroit met minister and former missionary to Romania Willis Bontrager. They visited at Pleasant View and testified to a great need of, and great difficulty in, maintaining their nonconformed faith and life in the assimilationist West.[3] They were very glad to learn of noncon-

[3] Romanian Pentecostals, having endured long persecution and cultural isolation under Communism, are in some ways more similar to Plain Anabaptist groups than to American Pentecostals.

formist churches in America, and were among the many Romanian expatriates present at the wedding of Willis' son, Matthew, to a Romanian coworker from Suceava.

A third group that provides a challenge to the missional vision of the Pleasant View church consists of people of non-Mennonite, non-Plain background. As noted above, a fifth of Beachy Amish names in the United States are not descended from those of the Amish migrations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of these have been Amish for a long time, coming in as indentured servants. Some have been people who were employed by the Amish. Some have likely been business associates. For Plain people their businesses and business conduct can be a strong witness in the world. Some have come in from other similar groups. Several, especially in recent years, have been seekers and nonconformists searching for a lifestyle of ethical consistency.

This nonconformist group has grown in recent years, perhaps in part as a corollary of the burgeoning home school movement. It consists of people who have a deep dissatisfaction with the religious status quo, a conviction that something is seriously wrong with Western Christianity. Some have come out of Evangelical churches after originally coming from secular backgrounds; others grew up in Evangelical homes. Most have had the experience of a nagging feeling of hypocrisy as they tried, often for years, to live out an ethic of consistent obedience within established churches. They are often deeply bothered by the political maneuvering, and sometimes social or physical threats, they have found there. Many

devout people live their entire lives this way, but for those who come to the Plain churches there is usually some breaking point, some point at which they "fall off the deep end." The phrase is humorous, but is deeply descriptive of the break converts feel from their previous religious contexts. In previous years, that breaking point may have been a decision to homeschool or have a home birth, although homeschooling has become increasingly integrated into the evangelical mainstream, and home birth is popular among people of a wide variety of beliefs and values. The most common point at which people who come to the Plain churches break from Protestant "reality" is the decision of the wife to wear a head covering in obedience to 1 Corinthians 11. It is not an isolated decision. It is related to a constellation of matters of personal and family conviction, but it is a visible sign that sets the family at variance with the Protestant system. Opposition (perceived or actual) from other church members and extended family commonly ensues. Families in this position often find in the Plain churches a refuge, a like-minded fellowship that they have never experienced before.

Plain churches like Pleasant View are strongly attractive to nonconformist seekers simply by virtue of their own consistent lifestyle, but have some difficulty retaining them as members. I would suggest at least three reasons for this. The first is that nonconformists are sometimes slow to commit themselves to membership. One father in this category told me, "In the past I've made so many wrong decisions. I want to be sure I'm not doing it again." There is good reason for such caution: nonconformists often do not suc-

cessfully integrate into Plain churches. Some go into foreign missions, and a few go to stricter conservative Evangelical churches as a temporary refuge, but many, perhaps a majority, end up in isolation outside any church fellowship. Only a few return to mainline Protestant or moderate Evangelical churches. I am told there was once an Amish bishop who returned to Roman Catholicism.

A second reason that many nonconformists do not stay in Plain churches is the worldward drift they find there. To people who feel they have been fighting the currents of popular culture hard and long in the Protestant churches, it is more than a little unsettling to find similar currents in Plain fellowships emerging from Old Order traditionalism. They have little use for progress if progress means returning to the hypocrisy and anomie from whence they came. Many are too quick to conclude that this is where Plain "progressives" are headed. It may be difficult for them to distinguish between rebellion against God and a reconsideration of rules that legalistically add to Scripture.

A third and perhaps more important reason that nonconformists have difficulty in Plain churches is that there is a serious spiritual problem with the nonconformists themselves. In many cases they are attracted to the Plain lifestyle because of its emphasis on ethically consistent obedience to the Bible, but they are not schooled in the *gelassenheit* (yieldedness) that keeps Plain congregations together. They are used to fighting the current of their former churches, and it may be hard to stop. It may be difficult for them to trust others in the church. It may be especially hard to

trust those in authority within the church when they have a history of seeing authority misused or misplaced. In addition, as with anyone else, it may be easier for them to see the sins of others than to see their own sins, and it may be difficult to have their own sins pointed out. If the Pleasant View church can exemplify and teach the need for a submissive spirit, yielded and staid on Christ, it may provide a great service to searching nonconformists.

The Pleasant View church has had some experience with non-Mennonite nonconformists over the past decade. Some have spent a few years at Pleasant View. One family even became members before integrating into a more conservative fellowship in Kentucky. The father of this family pointed out to me that, while the majority of those who come to the Plain churches may not stay, "there are gobs and gobs of people who do." An older gentleman has been driving to services at Pleasant View every other week from his home fifty miles away for nine years. Another young man, a son of a family that left without joining, stayed on as an active member of the church and is now in voluntary service in Virginia. It may be that, as Pleasant View is seen as a way station for people leaving the Amish lifestyle, it is also a way station for people coming in to the Plain churches from the outside.

There is a desire among several members at Pleasant View to witness to non-Amish and non-Mennonites in the area. This is a big challenge. Members do bear a strong witness to those outside their tradition in their daily lives: one counsels a business contact and invites him to church, another witnesses to telemarketers, another

offers to help a woman stranded beside the road, another helps an indigent hitchhiker. Most of their witness is of the planting kind, and the importance of such witness should never be underestimated. It may be difficult for the congregation as a whole, given their emergence from and ties to the Old Order Amish, to integrate people from outside that context. It may be that the Old Order provides a sufficient mission field for the present. Conversely, it may be that with some effort and much patience, Pleasant View will be able to reach outside its own context with a yielded, consistent, whole-life Gospel.

Priorities in Mission

The purpose of this section is to articulate the essential priorities of the Pleasant View Church as it reflects on its own missional vision. These priorities have been drawn mostly from sermons, devotionals and topics given by ministers and laymen, and from conversations with and among members. This is not an attempt to suggest priorities to the congregation; rather, it is an attempt to describe the priorities the congregation currently holds.

Several themes appear to be of special importance at Pleasant View. The themes addressed most often by Pleasant View speakers (see Table 1) are yielding to God (53% of sermons and 47% of devotionals and topics) and ethical and spiritual consistency (39% of sermons and 48% of devotionals and topics). Between them, these themes are addressed by the vast majority of speakers (78% of sermons and 73% of devotionals and topics). That these are important is not surprising: they reflect the Plain Anabaptist ethic of complete

obedience to the Word of God at any cost, and the spiritual and moral values of *gelassenheit* (yieldedness). Christian nonconformity is also addressed frequently (22% of sermons and 15% of devotionals and topics) as are the coming judgment of God (18% of sermons and 27% of devotionals and topics) and the patient mercy of God (17% of sermons and 18% of devotionals and topics). The unity of the fellowship is addressed a little less frequently (16% of sermons and 12% of devotionals and topics), but is nonetheless an important issue in conversation and congregational decisionmaking. These themes appear to reflect the congregation's identity as people of the living God, separate from the world and awaiting Christ's return. Basic, theological, doctrinal issues are also fairly commonly addressed (19% of sermons and 23% of devotionals and topics), reflecting an Arminian theology similar to what one might find in many Evangelical churches. Addressed less often are evangelism (13% of sermons and 10% of devotionals and topics) and martyrdom (10% of sermons and 10% of devotionals and topics).

These themes are essential because they reflect the values of the congregation, the bases on which it can make its decisions and on which it chooses its direction. It is not likely that, on reflection, the congregation will want to choose some course of action that would bring it into direct conflict with the New Testament. It may be that the church would feel that actively choosing its own direction at all would be a violation of its submission before God. A study such as this one, which hopes to provide the ministerial leadership with helps in discerning the

congregation's direction, may also be seen as a violation of this yielded stance before a God who is able to provide all the congregation needs. There is a tendency for academic study to promote a spirit of pride and self-sufficiency inimical to Christian humility. Many academics have recognized this throughout history, and some have left the academy because of it.[4] Self-sufficiency is not the aim here, and it must be recognized that God is more than able to take the initiative in leading the fellowship, especially if the fellowship is faithful and obedient to Him. The congregation may have mixed feelings about maintaining its current standards, but it is not likely that it will abandon its sectarian identity within the present generation, and it is even less likely that it will lose its emphasis on a true, heartfelt faith. Many members seem aware that they will be held accountable to God for their decisions and actions. It is common at Pleasant View to hear the term "Brokenness before the Lord," and brokenness is perhaps the most essential quality of Pleasant View as it faces its future.

If these things are essential, it may be worth discussing some things that do not appear to be essential at Pleasant View. Most Pleasant View members are very concerned that their faith not be replaced by a cold, wooden devotion to rules for their own sake. Legalism presents a special temptation to people of Amish back-

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[4] A notable example is Gottfried Arnold, who left his university post at Geissen because of a "secular environment which fostered pride." See Dale Brown, "The Problem of Subjectivism in Pietism" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1962), 101.

Table 1: Sermons, Devotionals and Topics, 1999 and 2000

Sermon Themes Addressed	1999 n=31	2000 n=46	Total n=77
Yieldedness/Dependence on God	16 (52%)	25 (54%)	41 (53%)
Ethical/Spiritual Consistency	11 (35%)	19 (41%)	30 (39%)
Nonconformity/Anab. Identity	9 (29%)	9 (20%)	18 (22%)
Doctrinal Teaching	7 (23%)	8 (17%)	15 (19%)
Judgment of God/Second Coming	3 (10%)	11 (24%)	14 (18%)
Mercy of God	4 (13%)	9 (20%)	13 (1 7%)
Unity among Believers	5 (16%)	8 (17%)	13 (17%)
Mission/Witnessing	4 (13%)	6 (13%)	10 (13%)
Suffering/Martyrdom	2 (6%)	6 (13%)	8 (10%)
Sermons Addressing Conduct at Home and Work			
Conduct at Home	13 (42%)	18 (39%)	31 (40%)
Conduct at Work	13 (42%)	16 (35%)	29 (38%)
Both	7 (23%)	8 (17%)	15 (19%)

Devotional and Topic Themes Addressed	1999 n=20	2000 n=40	Total n=60
Ethical/Spiritual Consistency	11 (55%)	18 (45%)	29 (48%)
Yieldedness/Dependence on God	8 (40%)	20 (50%)	28 (47%)
Judgment of God/Second Coming	8 (40%)	8 (20%)	16 (27%)
Doctrinal Teaching	1 (5%)	11 (28%)	12 (20%)
Mercy of God	3 (15%)	7 (18%)	10 (18%)
Nonconformity/Anab. Identity	2 (10%)	7 (18%)	9 (15%)
Unity among Believers	3 (15%)	4 (10%)	7 (12%)
Mission/Witnessing	3 (15%)	3 (8%)	6 (10%)
Suffering/ Martyrdom	3 (15%)	3 (8%)	6 (10%)

ground. The argument, for example, that covering strings can prevent the "snowflake" phenomenon may be sadly true but reflects a condition in which such regulation is necessary. Devotion to rules can lead to a sort of happy Pharisaism, a life of going through pleasant motions, in which it is easy to become complacent. Another potential trap is the notion that social relevance can come simply by abandoning rules. Cold tradition and lukewarm rebellion are but mirror images of one another. In both, yieldedness to God and ethical consistency are sacrificed in the interest of advancing or

comforting oneself. In both, nonconformity has nothing to do with being transformed by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1-2). In both, witness to the world is confused with surrender to the world. On these things Pleasant View members seek to strike a balance.

Family relations represent another set of issues at Pleasant View. It is essential that families be called, created and structured according to the New Testament pattern. A significant plurality of sermons (40%) address family relations, and the congregation's standard is very specific about what is expected in family life. Members make a solid, conscious effort to build solid, happy marriages and raise stable, happy children, and they appear to be very successful. Extended families are also valued, but herein lies a potential problem. If family is too important, New Testament admonitions that relativize family claims (Luke 14:26, Matt. 10:34f) can lose their meaning. There could be a possibility that "protecting" the family might become a motive to cover up, rather than confess, gross sin. A family name means nothing to God; it does not appear to be essential to the leaders at Pleasant View, either, but the time may come when accountability is necessary to ensure that it does not become essential to the church.

The priorities of the Pleasant View congregation appear in most areas to be consistent with what one might expect.[5] Pleasant View members hold to a Plain Anabaptist view of the world and the

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[5] The expectations of this study were developed after two or three years of exposure to Pleasant View's life and witness. This paper has tried to be fair, but cannot pretend to possess objectivity.

church for the most part, and although some may perceive themselves as more in line with the American Evangelical world, it is a world they are ill-equipped to understand. The priorities of yieldedness and consistency are deeply ingrained. What bothers Pleasant View "progressives" appears to be a lack of these qualities among the traditional Amish, not the importance assigned to them. One might expect martyrdom to be a more common theme, but as is frequently noted, it is not a particular threat in Illinois at this time - especially not in the context of a stable, established Amish community. Indeed, the congregation's priorities seem well suited for reaching people in that context with a fresh presentation and demonstration of the Plain Anabaptist vision that should be latent within its heritage. Whether they are well-suited for reaching beyond that context, or to sustaining that vision over generations, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 10

POSSIBILITIES FOR MISSION

It has not been the purpose of this paper to delineate strategies or suggest programs for the Pleasant View congregation. From the beginning, this paper has sought to describe the church's development and exercise of missional vision, not to try to direct its course. The aim has been to learn from the fellowship, not to teach it. This chapter will suggest several possibilities for the future development of Pleasant View's mission, and it is hoped that the ministry will find these ideas helpful in their own consideration, but it should be made clear that it does not purport to make recommendations. Recommendations would best come from within the membership, or from mature, seasoned leaders within the Beachy Amish constituency.

Pleasant View Church appears to be a large, growing, and in most respects healthy, Amish Mennonite congregation. With over 51 families and 135 members, and worship attendance averaging around 150, it is considerably larger than the average Beachy church.[1] The church worships in a simple facility with an upstairs auditorium

[1] On average, Beachy Amish congregations have 60 members. Pleasant View ranks sixteenth in size of 153 congregations, according to information in the 2001 issue of Christian Light Publications' Mennonite Church Information, 16-28.

with a prayer room at the rear, a concrete-floored basement, and a mid-level foyer. Children and youth meet for Sunday School in the basement, while six adult classes segregated by sex and age meet upstairs. There are two nurseries with additional cribs in the basement and two restrooms. The building is sometimes cramped, especially on special occasions, or on ordinary Sundays when attendance is higher than normal. There may be some evidence that, with its large size, the fellowship is loosening. One older member has stated that "there isn't the love here that there used to be." An attempt by the ministry to propose modifications to the written standard in 1998 revealed some disagreements among the membership. No decision was made at that time, and the disagreements have lain dormant since. There is a possibility that the congregation's size could lead to lesser accountability, and perhaps a lesser closeness, among members.

It could be that the congregation and its leadership feel no urgency to do anything at present. The church is growing, it seems strong, and it appears to be at peace. On the other hand, there may be a danger of strife if dormant disagreements surface; and there may be a danger of spiritual complacency if they do not. It is possible that the ministry will want to consider its direction and try to anticipate problems before they arise. I believe that it is possible that the congregation may take one of four potential directions:

Holding the Course. It may be most likely that the congregation will make no major changes. There could be an emphasis given to developing a sense of missionary responsibility, and of missionary vision, within the congregation. This could be done through preaching, topics, teaching and retreats, and could provide specific opportunities to engage in Christian witness. It appears, however, that this emphasis already exists, and that these things are already being done.

Enlarging the Tent. It may be that the church facility is nearing its capacity and needing replacement or expansion. The church has a number of young families with small children, and at times additional nursery space or toilet facilities would be convenient. There is a growing number of older members for whom negotiating stairs can be a challenge. Four adult Sunday School classes meet in the auditorium and sometimes overhear each other. A building project would be costly, but probably doable given the skills and financial stability of the congregation. On the other hand, while buildings may bring convenience, they do not necessarily prevent or cure complacency and may not adequately address the problem of a loosening fellowship. Some may well wonder if building "a new tent" would be the best use of the fellowship's resources from a New Testament perspective.

Setting Off Buds. The congregation might decide, especially in the presence of an exceptional revival of missionary vision, to send out five or six families periodically to start, or help start, new congregations. This is a radical idea which would require much

prayer and faith. It would significantly alter the missionary awareness of the congregation. In the long run, it could be that the church would remain the same size, but the total membership coming out of Pleasant View would possibly grow more rapidly. This would require much research and cooperation among those charged with planning, great sacrifice from those sent out, and ample support and assistance from those who remain. The selection of families and commissioning of leaders could be problematic; perhaps other congregations with experience in this area might be able to provide guidance. Such a plan could raise unforeseen problems that, on further reflection, could be beyond the present ability of the church.

Parting the Fellowship. Pleasant View experienced division in 1981 when it had reached a similar size, and several members withdrew from the church to form the Trinity Christian Fellowship. The conflict surrounding that division has subsided, and today the congregations work very closely together. A split could again occur along the lines of some conflict that might emerge, or along ideological lines, but that does not seem probable or desirable at this time. Conflict may not be necessary, however. The congregation could be split along geographical or some other such lines, undergoing mitosis, so to speak. This would allow members to stay in the same general area where they now reside, or perhaps encourage them to move to some area adjacent to the present community. Moving would not necessarily or immediately be required, and a carefully selected location could allow members to be near enough to relatives in the Amish community to be comfortable, yet not so near as to feel

stifled. It could eventually be necessary to divide the ministry and erect a new facility, and this may be a difficult direction in which to lead the church.

The congregation could also be divided along missional lines. This would require much prayer and sorting out as families are chosen and called to go out to form a new church. This idea would require many families, more than the five or six mentioned above. It would likely require that one of the ministry go along. The new congregation could locate at a distance farther from the community. It may be possible to find less expensive land and homes, but there would need to be opportunity for work and business. Such a division would clearly involve a focus on witnessing and living outside the Amish setting. Sending forth a new congregation would require that the present congregation devote much time to prayer and study, and considerable effort to assisting the new church as it gets established, erects a facility, and settles into life in a new location. Dividing along geographical or missional lines may enable the congregation to avoid the acrimony, however temporary, of an ideological split. It may also reflect a greater degree of spiritual maturity among members.

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper to predict the missional future of the Pleasant View church. It is also beyond the scope of the church. The future mission of the Pleasant View congregation is up to God, and He will lead the church as He sees fit. It may be that it would be wise for the leadership at Pleasant View to consider the possibilities outlined here, or to come up with

others more tenable; conversely, it may be wiser to refrain from fixing what does not appear to be broken. The congregation is already involved in many forms of mission and witness, as a fellowship, as families and as individuals. If the congregation and its ministers will seek wholeheartedly the sovereign will of God, striving to be utterly true to Christ in all of life and in all of thought, I believe they will discover and fulfill the great purpose in store for them as the people of the Living God.

CONCLUSION

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God, and keep his commandments:
for this is the whole duty of man.
For God shall bring every work into judgment,
with every secret thing,
whether it be good, or whether it be evil.
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

On a personal level, the conclusion of this study represents the closing of a long chapter in my own life and, perhaps, the opening of another. It was with some uncertainty that I left the pastoral ministry, or rather came to the conclusion that God did not want me to return of my own will. In researching and writing this project I have struggled with many of my own motives. At times my primary motive has been the absence of a clear sign that I should stop and at times it has been a simple desire to be finished. Before coming to Pleasant View, I had always nursed some long-term ministry or career goal in the back of my mind, never quite grasping the contradiction between such ambition and genuine service to Christ. Leaving the ministry was like entering a large, thick cloud in which I could see nothing, but it soon became apparent that the cloud had always been there. The future I had envisioned for myself had been a figment of my own imagination, rather than the pointing finger of God.

It may seem like a crisis of faith to declare that I should have come to doubt my calling sooner, but it is necessary to be rid of false faith in order to believe truly in the loving power of God. I do not know where His hand will lead me, or how, but when the way is open I intend to follow. I believe the next step for my family and me will be to search out the fellowship of a congregation of like-minded believers among whom we can discern and pursue the call of God in our lives, who will hold us accountable and encourage us to be faithful to Christ. As outsiders, we face problems unusual among the Plain people. Practical considerations such as employment and housing will likely play a role, as will the fact that we are blessed with a Down Syndrome child. It may be that Pleasant View is that congregation, or it may be that some other fellowship is the context to which we are called. We have hardly begun to discern this issue.

I hope and pray that this study, and our presence, has done Pleasant View no harm. Of all the churches and fellowships in which we have been involved so far, we find that Pleasant View is without question the most likeminded. Our experience has been like that of many nonconformist seekers: this is the first church in which we have not been strange. Pleasant View has its own problems, especially related to its emergence from the Amish Old Order. An argument could be made that there are many psychological issues present among groups emerging from the Old Order that affect their own values and priorities in ways unbeknownst to them. This study might have benefited from a more in-depth examination of the Old Order

struggles that lie at the root of many of those faced at Pleasant View. I do not possess an in-depth appreciation of Old Order life, and consequently some of the analysis contained in this paper may be faulty. I trust that the ministers at Pleasant View, all of whom have been asked to read and comment on this paper as it has been written, will be able to discern this. It is my hope that they will be encouraged and emboldened in their leadership as they seek to guide the congregation. If this paper helps them in any way it will have met its primary goal.

Whether this study will have any benefit beyond my own family or the Pleasant View church is doubtful. Perhaps it will serve to encourage the two professors who have so patiently read and evaluated it, and perhaps it will serve to challenge some other reader. It may be that the Plain churches represent a model of cultural disengagement that is sorely needed in the Protestant world.[1] I question whether it is possible for the mainstream of American Christianity to disengage from its cultural context on a more than superficial level. The solution to the ills of the Church that is advanced in much of Evangelicalism focuses on meeting the "felt needs" of secular people, thus further acculturating itself rather than re-examining what it means to be the people of God. Engaging the world as a colony of the Kingdom of God is difficult for a people so thoroughly enmeshed with the kingdoms of this world, and

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[1] Perhaps they represent one answer to the call of D. J. Hall, The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity, 42-43, for churches to seek some cultural disengagement as a necessary precursor to mission. I do not know how far Hall and those like him are willing to go in their quest.

the road to meaningful disengagement may be too hard for American Christianity as we know it to travel. It will take a more thorough and more articulate presentation than this paper to make the point. I do not see reason to believe that the case for such disengagement can be made effectively among Evangelical churches for whom cultural relevance remains a driving motivational force. I do not see reason to believe that the case would even be heard among liberal Protestants. Mainline Anabaptists of the 1950s and 1960s were rocked by the exodus of young families embracing the then radical lifestyle of the Hutterian Bruderhof communities or other communal congregations such as Reba Place in Evanston, Illinois. Some of the communal congregations have since been integrated into the denominations from which they emerged. Such an exodus seems less than likely today, given the liberal bent of the mainline Anabaptist denominations. I know very few mainline Anabaptists that would see the kind of cultural disengagement described here as a way forward. This is all speculation, and not particularly fruitful. If this paper provides encouragement to any outside its intended readership, it will have gone beyond my own expectations.

APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE ON SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

December 23, 2000

Sam Matthews
3909 Greenswitch Rd.
Decatur, IL 62526

Dear Folks,

Attached is a questionnaire I have developed as part of research I am doing on my doctoral thesis. I've consulted with the ministry before distributing it; some of the questions may seem rather personal, and I do not want to offend. I am trying to get a better understanding of your faith and the ways you fulfill the mission of Christ in your lives. I am also interested in learning more about how you pass your faith along within your families.

Some of this must seem obvious to you. Please forgive me if some of the questions or choices seem odd. If you can try to fill it out as completely as possible, I'd really appreciate it. If at all possible, I'd like to have your responses back in my box as soon as you can get them to me; sometime within the next two weeks (January 7) would be ideal, but I'll be grateful for them whenever I can get them. These surveys are anonymous, so please be honest. If you have additional comments or advice, I'd be glad for that also.

Thank you very much for your help, and for your friendship and kindness to us these last three years.

Very Sincerely Yours,

Sam Matthews

Your age range (please check one) __ 20 or under; __ 21-30; __ 31-40; __ 41-50; __ 51-60; __ 61-70; __ 71 or over

Male or Female? _____ Age when baptized _____

Religious upbringing (please check one):

__ Pleasant View Church
__ Other Beachy Amish
__ Old Order Amish
__ Other Mennonite
__ Non-Mennonite

What kind of schooling did you have? (check all that apply)

__ Pleasant View School
__ Arthur Mennonite School
__ Public School
__ College/Tech./Other
__ Other Mennonite School
__ Home School
__ Old Order Amish School
__ Calvary Bible School/SMBI/etc.

What kind of school do/did you provide for your children? (check all that apply, if applicable)

__ Pleasant View School
__ Arthur Mennonite School
__ Public School
__ College/Tech./Other
__ Other Mennonite School
__ Home School
__ Old Order Amish School
__ Calvary Bible School/SMBI/etc.

How often would you say the following were practiced at home growing up?

	Daily+	\2+/wk	\Weekly	\Biweekly	\Monthly	\Occas.	\ Seldom
Bible Study	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Pray at meals	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Individ. Prayer	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Pray w/spouse	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Family Worship	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Church Attend.	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Fasting	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Tithing	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Reading of Martyrs Mirror or similar	__	__	__	__	__	__	__

How often would you say you practice these at home today?

	Daily+	\2+/wk	\Weekly	\Biweekly	\Monthly	\Occas.	\Seldom
Bible Study	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Pray at meals	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Individ. Prayer	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Pray w/spouse	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Family Worship	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Church Attend.	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Fasting	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Tithing	__	__	__	__	__	__	__
Reading of Martyrs Mirror or similar history	__	__	__	__	__	__	__

Have you ever participated in (please check) __ Voluntary Service, __ I-W Service, or __ Missionary Service?

In what ways do you, personally, bear witness of your faith? (please check all that apply)

__ Door-to-door witnessing
__ Personal conversations
__ Correspondence
__ Nursing home ministry
__ Service projects
__ Pray for missionaries
__ Singing for others
__ By Telephone
__ Other (Please list) _____

__ Tract or book distribution
__ Invite neighbors to church
__ Jail or prison ministry
__ Otto Center Projects
__ Pray for certain lost souls
__ Mission support
__ Personal/Business Ethics
__ On the Internet

_____

_____

What factors would you say influence the witness you bear? (please check that apply)

__ The Bible
__ Fellow members
__ Conferences
__ Newspaper
__ Other (Please list) _____

__ The Holy Spirit
__ Sermons and topics
__ Business contacts
__ Personal experience

__ Family
__ Books read
__ Radio/ Internet
__ Nonbelievers

_____

Other than the Bible, what books would you say have been especially influential in your own Christian life?
(Please list author and title, if possible)

_____

_____

_____

What do you believe to be the central purpose of the church?
(please check no more than three)

__ To provide a standard for the world
__ To care for the needy
__ To uphold the institutions of society
__ To administer the sacraments
__ To seek the Kingdom of God
__ To pray for those in power
__ To love one another
__ Other (Please List) _____

__ To reach the unsaved
__ To set up colonies of God's Kingdom
__ To guide the culture
__ To worship God
__ To meet the needs of members
__ To care for the elderly
__ To raise up Godly children and youth

_____

_____

THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU

APPENDIX 2

SOME OF THE MINISTRIES AND MISSIONS SUPPORTED BY PLEASANT VIEW MEMBERS

I. Beachy Amish Organizations

Amish Mennonite Aid. Founded 1953. AMA is an umbrella organization that oversees 15 voluntary service (VS) units, as well as congregations and missions in Belize, El Salvador, Kenya and Paraguay. Originally organized to help young men meeting their Conscientious Objection requirements under Selective Service, AMA now sees the establishment of new congregations as one of its primary missions, but also staffs medical clinics and church schools. In Kenya, many (over 15,000) have become interested in whole-life Christianity through Lamp and Light (q.v.) Bible courses, and form the nucleus of recent AMA sponsored congregations there. Contact person: Vernon Miller, 2675 US Rt. 42 NE, London, OH 43140. Tel. (614) 879-5420. E-mail amaid@juno.com.

Beside the Still Waters. This is a daily devotional guide published by Beachy Amish members in the interest of stimulating prayer, discipleship and thought. It contains writings from members of other Plain groups as well. Contact person: Vernon Troyer, ed., 270 Antioch Rd., Clarkson, KY 42726. Tel. (270) 242-9375.

Blue Ridge International for Christ. Supports church conferences, revivals and children's ministries in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Also has self-help programs and is involved in well drilling and repair. Contact person: Eli Smucker, 5470 Elan Rd., Gap, PA 17529. Tel. (717) 768-8142.

Calvary Bible School. Established 1970. Provides discipleship-oriented training in Bible, ministry and missions for young adults through four three-week terms from January through March. Address is 6466 CR 73, Calico Rock, AR 72519. Contact person: Menno Kuhns, director, Arthur, IL. Tel. (217) 543-2930.

Calvary Messenger. Semi-official news and inspirational magazine of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches. Published by Calvary Publications, 2673 TR 421, Sugarcreek, OH 44681. Contact person: Paul Miller, ed., Partridge, KS. Tel. (316) 567-2286. E-mail paullmiller@mindspring.com.

Christian Mission Charities. Founded 1972. Supports separatist Baptist and evangelical missions from the nonregistered churches of the former Soviet Union (and other communist or Muslim lands) with finances, Bibles and Christian literature, clothing, food and medical supplies. Also supports Christian orphanages in Romania, Pakistan, India and Nigeria. Address is P.O.Box 523, Middlebury, IN 46540. Tel. (219) 642-4029. E-mail cmc1@maplenet.net. Contact person: Cornelius Beachy, director.

Faith Mission Home, Hillcrest Home - see Mission Interest Commitee.

Master's International Ministries. Founded 1993. Has established the Kiev Evangelical Mennonite Church in Ukraine, and works with existing Bible-based churches. Operates medical clinics in Kiev and in surrounding villages. Translates and distributes Christian literature from Lamp and Light (q.v.), Christian Aid Ministries (q.v.), and other sources. Distributes garden seed and supplies provided by Christian Aid Ministries to needy persons in Kiev, as well as Bible kits, Bibles, and other aid. Address is RR1, Milverton, ON N0K1M0, Canada. Tel. (519) 656-2330.

Mission Interest Committee. Established 1952. Similar to AMA, the MIC was originally organized for Amish Conscientious Objectors meeting their service requirements. It is an umbrella organization that oversees several VS units and missions in Ontario, Belgium, Ireland and the United States. MIC operates the Hillcrest nursing home, a county-owned facility in Arkansas, as a VS unit, which supplies income for some of its missions. MIC also operates the Faith Mission Home, a residential care, treatment and training facility in the mountains of Virginia for the mentally handicapped. Contact person: Melvin Gingerich, 4255 S 900 W, Topeka, IN 46751. Tel (219) 593-9090.

Penn Valley. A retreat center taken over by the Beachy Amish in 1991. Address is 28221 CR 50, Nappannee, IN 46550. Contact person: Wayne Schrock, director. Tel. (219) 773-4734.

II. Cooperative Ministries with Other Plain Groups

Christian Aid Ministries. Distributes food, clothing, Christian literature and other aid through bases in Romania, Moldova, Haiti, Nicaragua and Liberia, and operates a disaster response program. Provides teaching ministries in Eastern Europe and Central America. Operates an orphanage in Romania. Operates clothing collection and sorting centers in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Ontario, and a food distribution center and meat cannery in Ephrata, PA. Address is P.O.Box 360, Berlin, OH 44610. Tel. (330) 893-2428.

Christian Light Press. Independent conservative Mennonite publisher of books, Bible school material, tracts, devotional literature, Sunday School curriculum and a complete line of school curriculum. Offers special services to homeschooling families, also. Address is P.O.Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA 22803-1212. Tel. (540) 434-0768.

Deeper Life Ministries. Operated by the Midwest Mennonite Fellowship. Residential rehabilitation for single women and families. Also provides seminars on discipleship and family life. Address is 5123 Converse Huff Rd., Plain City, OH 43064. Tel. (614) 873-1199. E-mail deeperlifeohio@juno.com.

Faith Builders Educational Programs. An independent conservative Mennonite ministry. Trains teachers and Christian workers to staff schools and other ministries, with apprenticeship programs in teaching and health care (CNA). Address is P.O.Box 127, Guys Mills, PA 16327. Tel. (814) 789-4518. E-mail fbep@toolcity.net.

Fresh Start. Operated by the Midwest Mennonite Fellowship. Residential rehabilitation and training in a highly structured environment for single men and men with families, focusing on prayer, Bible study, group interaction and work. Address is 5 Industrial Park Dr., Washington, IN 47501. Tel. (812) 254-3399.

Lamp and Light. A literature ministry operated by the Nationwide Fellowship Churches. Publishes tracts and Bible correspondence courses in English and French, with some work translated into Russian (see Master's International Ministries). Address is 26 Road 5577, Farmington, NM 87401-1436. Tel. (505) 632-3521.

Mexico Mennonite Aid. Assists Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite colonies in Mexico, works with Heifer Project, an ecumenical group, to provide livestock. Provides information, assistance and book ministries in Campeche State. Contact person: Melvin Yoder, 6838 Millersburg Rd., Gambier, OH 43022. (740) 427-4269.

Northern Youth Programs. Independent conservative Mennonite ministry providing schools, counseling, prison ministries and youth activities among Native Canadians. Address is Site 306, Box 1 RR 3, Dryden, ON P8N3C2, Canada. Tel. (807) 937-4421. Contact person: Clair Schnupp. E-mail nymschnupp@moosenet.net.

Rod and Staff Publishers. Founded 1958. Operated by the Nationwide Fellowship Churches. Publishes books, Bible school and Sunday school material, periodicals, tracts and devotional literature, and a complete line of school curricula for grades 1-10. Address is P.O. Box 3, Crockett, KY 41413. Tel. (606) 522-4348.

III. Cooperative Ministries with Other Mennonites and Evangelicals

Choice Books. Program of the Mennonite Board of Missions, places devotional books and literature in grocery stores, lobbies, and a variety of other places. Address is 1251 Virginia Ave., Harrisonburg, VA 22801. Tel. (540) 434-1827. E-mail cb@choicebooks.org.

Gospel Echoes. Founded in 1976. Largely supported by Conservative Conference Mennonites. Provides prison ministries in the U.S. and Canada, correspondence Bible study, literature and New Life Study Testaments. Address is P.O.Box 555, Goshen, IN 46527. Tel. (219) 533-0221.

Gospel Express. Largely supported by Conservative Conference Mennonites. Prison ministries, as well as congregational and community revivals emphasizing inner healing and intercessory prayer. Also sponsors Door of Hope counseling ministry in Trion, N.C., for which tel. is (828) 859-0126 and E-mail is doorofhope@alltel.net.

Voice of the Martyrs. Provides literature, visitation, Bibles and broadcasts to communist, Muslim and other countries where Christianity is restricted. Provides relief to families of Christian martyrs and projects of encouragement and relief for believers in these areas, as well as information on atrocities against Christians. Address is P.O.Box 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005. Tel. (918) 337-8015. Website is www.persecution.com.

We Care Prison Ministries. Prison ministries in Alabama and Georgia including volunteer chaplaincy, Bible study and supervision of Honor Dorms. Address is 5825 Hwy. 21, Atmore, AL 36502-6315. Tel. (334) 368-8818. Website is www.wecareprogram.org.

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5/1990 - 8/1997	Pastor, Decatur Church of the Brethren, Decatur, IL
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