

“Can this new movement continue in the Amish Church? Can a split be avoided? If not, how will the new movement affect the conservative block of the church?”¹ In 1956, Harvey Graber was not alone in his concern for the future of the Amish Church. During the 1950s, the Old Order Amish Church encountered one of the most powerful forces of change in its 250-year history. This threat came from within the Church and divided families and communities. The threat, in short, was mission work.

During the mid-twentieth century, the Old Order Amish Church experienced a grassroots mission movement that stirred a revival within the church and turned attention to the outside world. This mission movement had far-reaching impacts on Amish structures and ways of life and resulted in the development of national mission conferences, a growing interest in service work, a new attitude toward higher education, and the codification of church beliefs and right practice.

The Old Order Amish church of Partridge, Kansas experienced a split in 1958 due to issues stemming from the national mission movement. The causes of the split were complex—from changing personal desires, to the issue of car ownership, to the new economic realities of the 1950s. Nonetheless, mission work functioned as the major wedge in the church split. The new church, with a focus on mission and service, soon joined the Beachy Amish. Although its size was severely diminished, the remaining Old Order Amish church, unlike other communities that experienced similar splits, reacted with moderation instead of further entrenching itself in conservatism.

¹ Harvey Graber, “Spiritual Awakening in the Old Order Amish Church” (unpublished paper, Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Ind., 1956), 25.

Preface

I hope that I have been able to avoid the two most common errors in scholarship about the Amish; what the *Library Journal* identifies as “the overly sentimental approach of much popular writing and the anti-Amish bias of the rest.”² This tendency to be either extremely critical or to idealize the Amish typically results in popular portrayals of them as wild party-animals in disguise or wise, gentle relics of a bygone era.

This dichotomy between mistrust and fondness also trickles into scholarly research. I believe this is a direct result of the traditional Amish understanding of church and community—either you are Amish or you are not. Therefore, any source for a study of the Amish is either in or out of the community. There is never a dispassionate observer occupying the middle ground. I recognize that this could be said about most subjects. But, in my opinion, the difference between Amish and not-Amish is so great the dichotomy between sentimentality and anti-Amish bias is more pronounced.

Given that kind of challenge, how can one study a split in the Amish Church? Any source with a firsthand knowledge of the events also made a decision and judgment of the community when they chose to remain Amish or leave the church. Furthermore, how should I deal with my own tension regarding these issues? After all, I am the first generation of my family not to be born into the Amish Church. As a Partridge resident and a descendant of some of the actors in this church division, my interest in this topic is not simply academic. My personal connections to this community afforded me opportunities to conduct interviews and read personal diaries that might have proven inaccessible to other researchers. But because I

² Steven M. Nolt, *A History of the Amish*, rev. and updated, (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2003), back cover.

am not a member of either the Amish Church or the Beachy Amish Church, I, too, remain an outsider.

I grappled with this tension as I researched, read, and interviewed people about the church division of the 1950s. Eventually, I realized that these questions never go away. But by acknowledging them throughout my research, now, and in the future, I can constantly examine my work and minimize this tendency toward polarity. Truth, after all, is typically found in the balance of two extremes.

Prior Church Divisions

The Amish trace their history to the sixteenth-century Swiss Anabaptists. Although the various groups of Anabaptists broke away from Protestantism for many reasons, they found agreement on three basic tenets: salvation was an exercise in cooperation between the human and divine (God must offer and person must accept); adult baptism symbolized one's "spiritual enfranchisement" and one's freedom from clerical control ("priesthood of all believers"); and spiritual communities should be formed in local congregations (in contrast to the territorial Protestant and Catholic state churches).³

By refusing to take up the sword in combat, baptize infants, or swear oaths of allegiance, most Anabaptists threatened the traditional union of church and state.⁴ The Anabaptists challenged the idea that governments should interpret and enforce right-practice and right-belief. Rather, they proposed that Scripture be the ultimate authority. Jesus'

³ Walter Klaassen, "Anabaptism," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, available from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/a533me.html>, Internet, accessed 16 May 2006.

⁴ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Riddle of the Amish Culture*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 4.

teachings—in particular, the Sermon on the Mount—took on central importance for the Anabaptists.⁵

In the 1690s, a Swiss tailor named Jakob Ammann fled to the Alsace (in modern France) because of persecution by the Swiss civil authorities. Ammann was known as a “roving arch-Anabaptist” who advocated change and church renewal.⁶ He believed the Anabaptists had “forsaken the doctrines of Christ” and acculturated in unacceptable ways. Ammann preached that foot washing, twice-annual communion, untrimmed beards, and distinctive dress would help remind Anabaptists of their place in this world. Most importantly, Ammann supported the use of *Meidung* (shunning of excommunicated members) as punishment. Other Anabaptists banned wayward members from partaking in communion but did not approve of social shunning. Beginning in 1693, Ammann used *Meidung* on Anabaptist leaders who disagreed with his teachings. This heightened the controversy and eventually led Ammann and his followers to break off into the group that would become known as the Amish.⁷

In the mid-nineteenth century, another schism occurred. This time the issues included supporting Sunday schools, the use of meeting houses, and even technological advances in agriculture. On June 9, 1862, the first of a series of annual ministers’ meetings (*Diener Versammlungen*) was held at a farm in Smithville, Ohio to discuss the future of the Church. The *Diener Versammlungen* occasioned the first church-wide discussions of expected behavior or “*Ordnung*.”⁸ Previously, *Ordnung* was lived, not taught. Suddenly, the Church found itself

⁵ Klaassen.

⁶ Kraybill, 7.

⁷ Harold S. Bender, “Amish Division,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1953, available from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A4584ME.html>, Internet, accessed 16 May 2006.

⁸ “The Amish blueprint for expected behavior, called the *Ordnung*, regulates private, public, and ceremonial life. *Ordnung* does not translate readily into English. Sometimes rendered as “ordinance” or “discipline,” the *Ordnung* is best thought of as an ordering of the whole way of life—a code of conduct which the church

articulating what it meant to be Amish. These meetings crystallized the differences between the conservatives and the progressives over many issues, including clothing, education, and holding public office.⁹ Eventually, many progressives broke off and joined the “Old” Mennonites (later known as the Mennonite Church). The remaining Amish Church became known as Old Order Amish because of their commitment to historical values and practices.¹⁰

Groups that left the Amish Church sometimes joined the Mennonite Church. But this was not always true; former Amish often found their way to Amish-Mennonite congregations. In the spectrum of Anabaptism, Amish-Mennonites fit somewhere between the Mennonite Church and the Old Order Amish Church. One of the largest groups of Amish-Mennonites was the Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship (“Beachy Amish”).

The Beachy Amish took their name from Moses M. Beachy, an early twentieth century bishop in the Old Order Amish Church of Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Beachy held a moderate view of *Meidung* and believed it should be used sparingly—especially on people transferring into the local Conservative (Amish-) Mennonite church.¹¹ In 1923, J.F. Swartzendruber, a like-minded bishop from Kalona, Iowa, wrote to Beachy, reminding him of early Amish history when the debate over *Meidung* only increased tensions and led to church division.¹² Though he agreed with Beachy, Swartzendruber hoped another split could be

maintains by tradition rather than by systematic or explicit rules. A member noted: "The order is not written down. The people just know it, that's all." Rather than a packet or rules to memorize, the Ordnung is the "understood" set of expectations for behavior... The Ordnung evolved gradually over the decades as the church sought to strike a delicate balance between tradition and change. Interpretation of the Ordnung varies somewhat from congregation to congregation." Kraybill, 112.

⁹ Nolt, *History of the Amish*, 160.

¹⁰ Further descriptions of the *Diener Versammlungen* are seen in Paton Yoder, *Tradition and Transition: Amish Mennonites and Old Order Amish 1800-1900*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, vol. 31 (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991), 137-152.

¹¹ For more on Conservative Mennonites see Ivan J. Miller, "Conservative Mennonite Conference," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, available at <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/c6676me.html>, Internet, accessed 18 May 2006.

¹² Alvin J. Beachy, "The Rise and Development of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29, no. 2 (1955): 120-121.

avoided. However, *Meidung* once again proved too contentious, and on April 24, 1927, Beachy and his congregation held their first meeting outside of the Church.

Moses Beachy recognized that by leaving the Amish Church, people would feel more freedom to adopt “English” conveniences. At a council meeting in November 1926, Beachy proclaimed that short dresses, automobiles, and short haircuts for men would continue to be banned. Nonetheless, by February 1929 the Beachy congregation had approved of electricity, Sunday school, and automobiles.¹³ This led many Old Order Amish to believe that Beachy’s followers were primarily motivated by their interest in technological conveniences.¹⁴

On August 1, 1948, a church split took place in Partridge that, like the Beachy division of 1927, would affect the course of events in the 1950s. Seven families broke from the Partridge Amish Church and formed their own congregation called the “Conservative Church” (later known as “Plainview Conservative Mennonite Church”).¹⁵ This small group joined the Conservative Mennonite Conference due to the long-simmering issues of modernization of worship (including English church services), vehicle ownership, and relaxed dress standards.¹⁶ Despite a general consensus about the cause for the split, Clara Miller, a charter member of the Conservative Church, explained that spiritual considerations also figured into the decision:

A group of us could not feel that we were doing all that could be done to teach and instruct our children. We felt the children should take part more and should have Sunday school and church every Sunday the year around. We did not feel we were honoring God the way we could by having services only every other Sunday through the winter months. We also felt we should have some meeting on Sunday evening and are all in favor of more missionary work of any kind.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 128-130.

¹⁴ David L. Miller, interview by author, tape recording, Partridge, Kans., 25 April 2006.

¹⁵ Willie W. Wagler, personal diary, in the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller, 1948.

¹⁶ Steven M. Nolt, lecture handout, “Plain Diversity: Amish Life in a Changing World” (presented at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies: Hillsboro, Kans., May 5, 2007).

¹⁷ Quoted in David Wagler, “History and Change of the Amish of Reno County, Kansas” (unpublished paper, Mennonite Library and Archives: North Newton, Kans., 1968), 22.

This early departure of the people most impatient for change left the remaining Amish congregation with a group of people committed to working at change from within the Church. Those that became discouraged could join the Conservative Church. The stage was set for a decade of dialogue and debate about the future of the Old Order Amish Church.

Community History and Influences from Without

Daniel E. “Doddy” Mast was an important early leader in the Partridge Amish church and was known for his support of religious education. Born in Holmes County, Ohio in 1848, Mast moved to the Partridge community in April 1886. Shortly after arriving in Partridge, Mast successfully led a movement to organize Sunday school for every-other Sunday meeting. The Sunday school was one of only two in all Amish churches in North America.¹⁸ Ordained a deacon in 1891 and as a minister in 1914, Mast became well known throughout the broader Amish community for his frequent contributions to the Amish publication *Herold der Wahrheit* and a popular book of devotions that was later translated as *Salvation Full and Free*.¹⁹ According to mission movement supporter Harvey Graber, “Preacher D.E. Mast...probably did more to quicken the spiritual life of that [Partridge] Amish community than any other factor.”²⁰

The Partridge Amish were also distinguished by their interest in higher education. In the winter of 1948, Orpha Wagler became the first member of the Partridge community—and the first Amish woman ever—to attend college. Because of her experience in voluntary service in Gulfport, Mississippi the previous summer, Wagler “felt [she] should learn more” about the

¹⁸ Yoder, 279.

¹⁹ Eli J. Bontrager, introduction to Daniel E. Mast, *Salvation Full and Free*, trans. and ed. John B. Mast (Inman, Kans.: Salem Publishing House, 1955), 6-7.

²⁰ Graber, 22.

Bible and general education.²¹ She began by enrolling in a six-week term of Bible classes at Hesston College. Eventually, she decided to stay for the following spring semester. In the following five years, six more members of the Partridge Amish Church—four men and two women—entered college.²²

Miller's experience in voluntary service was rare but not unique among the Partridge Amish. Several members of the community engaged in mission work without the official approval of their church. Perry L. Miller served in Puerto Rico with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite Relief Service Committee from 1947 to 1950. Also beginning in 1947, Harry L. Miller and Mahlon Wagler spent two years with MCC rebuilding homes damaged during World War Two in France and Germany.²³ Mahlon Wagler returned home from reconstruction work in France with "a growing conviction that the church needs more of an outreach, and an expression of a service of love and sacrifice, in peace time as well as in war time."²⁴ Starting in 1951, Mahlon Wagler had his wish; the Partridge Amish organized a local Missions Interest Committee. John and Elizabeth Bender were sent to Gulfport, Mississippi and became the first Amish mission workers supported by the Partridge Church.²⁵

In addition to voluntary service and education, the Amish experience during World War Two helped expose Amish youth to new forms of worship and theology. Because the Amish Church strictly forbade military service, most Amish men applied for and received conscientious objector status when drafted to fight in World War Two. These men were sent

²¹ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview by author, tape recording, Arlington, Kans., 17 July 2007.

²² David Wagler, 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴ Ervin Hershberger and Daniel E. Hochstetler, eds., *History and Memories of Hillcrest Home 1953-1978*, (Harrison, Ark.: Daniel Nisly, 1978?), 15, quoted in Nolt, 12.

²⁵ David Wagler, 17.

to Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps throughout the nation. At CPS camps, they lived, worked, and worshiped with men from various Anabaptist and non-Anabaptist traditions, including Mennonites, Hutterites, Quakers, and members of the Church of the Brethren. Interaction with other groups exposed many young Amish men to structured Bible studies and discussions of Christians' responsibility to others.²⁶

Amish church leaders faced new responsibilities due to the high number of young men in CPS. Ministers often traveled the country visiting the CPSers. In the course of their travels, these men encountered people who asked them to explain what it meant to be Amish. In particular, they faced many questions about pacifism and Amish garb. Pastor Willie Wagler recounted stories of these chance encounters in many of his later sermons.²⁷ Like the *Diener Versammlungen* of the nineteenth century, these travels forced the church leadership to articulate the Church's understanding of *Ordnung*.

Upon their return, Amish CPSers throughout the country faced communities whose religious climates were often described as "stagnant."²⁸ It came as no surprise that these men, in an effort to reconstruct the spiritual vitality they experienced in CPS, played significant roles in establishing mid-week Bible study and discussion groups in Amish communities across the country between 1948 and 1952.²⁹

This was the case in Partridge where Harry L. Miller, a former CPSer, led the first Wednesday night Bible study in a discussion of Philippians 2 on October 13, 1948.³⁰ Subsequent meetings came to be called "Young People's Meetings" and were held every two

²⁶ Steven M. Nolt, "The Amish 'Mission Movement' and the Reformulation of Amish Identity in the Twentieth Century," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 75, no. 1 (2001): 11.

²⁷ Harley Wagler, interview by author, email, Russia, 3 May 2006.

²⁸ For example, see David L. Miller.

²⁹ Graber, 16-17.

³⁰ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, personal diary, in the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller, 1948.

weeks in the church's Sunday school buildings. Each meeting consisted of devotions and one or several short sermons in German (all led by men).³¹ Elam Hochstetler (a future leader of the mission movement) reported being very impressed by a visit to the Partridge community's Bible study group in February 1950.³²

The Wednesday evening meeting provided the opportunity for people to “address matters of a very practical nature—issues that were too banal or earthy to be discussed in the regular Sunday morning services.”³³ This was due in large part to the fact that Young People's Meetings remained an initiative of the laity.³⁴ For instance, talk of nonresistance was rare in Sunday morning sermons, but due to the strong influence of the CPS experience on many young men, “Nonresistance” was the subject of three sermons at the second Wednesday evening gathering.³⁵ Although “Christian Courtship” was sometimes addressed from the pulpit, the August 31, 1949 mid-week meeting was the first time the topic had been led by young members of the church and discussed in an open forum.³⁶

Personal matters of faith were not the only topics of discussion at the Young People's Meetings. Beginning in August 1949, the group took offerings to assist members of their community and to support local and national mission and relief organizations.³⁷ Recipients of the offerings included the General Mission Board, the China Children's fund, “colored missions” in Saginaw, Michigan, the Hutchinson (Kansas) Mennonite Mission, the Amish

³¹ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview, 17 July 2007.

³² Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 14.

³³ Harley Wagler.

³⁴ Despite being called Young People's Meetings, all members of the church were welcome. Many ministers and deacons attended regularly and some even led devotions or preached. For example see [Record of Young People's Meetings], in the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller, 1948-1951.

³⁵ [Record of Young People's Meetings] and Willie W. Wagler, diary, 1948.

³⁶ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview, 17 July 2007.

³⁷ [Record of Young People's Meetings].

publication *Herold der Wahrheit*, and a church member with a large hospital bill.³⁸ Organizers of the meetings also invited guest lecturers to present on various topics. A Jewish speaker discussed the “establishment of Israel as a state, and how God’s prophecies were being fulfilled.” Another evening, Raymond Wagler discussed Jim Elliot’s death as a “martyr” while bringing the Gospel to the Auca tribe in Ecuador.³⁹ The Wednesday evening meetings helped to turn the participants’ eyes to the outside world, gave the laity experience in leading church organizations, and set the stage for the mission movement of the next decade.

While Bible studies, guest lecturers, and experiences in CPS undoubtedly played a role in developing the Church’s understanding of mission and service at a local level, they did not spark a nationwide movement within the Amish Church. That unlikely source of change came from outside the Amish community. An Italian Catholic from Detroit and recent convert into the Mennonite Church, Russell Maniaci (1895-1972) was credited by many as the critical catalyst for the Amish mission movement.⁴⁰

In the late 1940s, Maniaci noticed that his Amish neighbors’ reliance on tradition, ritual, and non-English preaching was reminiscent of the Catholicism from which he had fled. Maniaci was further disheartened by the lack of interest in evangelizing and the deteriorating morality of many Amish youth.⁴¹ In response, Maniaci became a “vocal, aggressive voice” in “waking up the collective conscience.”⁴²

Russell Maniaci organized the “First Amish Mission Conference” in 1950. The conference met at the Jonas Gingerich farm outside Kalona, Iowa from August 6-8. Between

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Quotation and paraphrase from Harley Wagler..

⁴⁰ Maniaci left Catholicism because of “his parents’ deaths and his horrific World War I battle experience.” Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 15.

⁴¹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁴² David L. Miller.

100 and 175 people attended each day and represented Old Order communities from across the country. CPS “testimonies,” singings, and speakers (among them, Elam Hochstetler and Maniaci) provided the bulk of the conference’s activities. However, the meeting’s most important role was to symbolize the participants’ unity in purpose; one woman described it as “knowing and seeing others present [with] interest in the same vision in mission.”⁴³

The first mission conference was such a success it became an annual gathering. At the third such meeting, held in Elkhart County, Indiana, August 17-19, 1952, a committee was formed to “coordinat[e] the thinking of the more evangelical element within the church and put this into action.” The five-member group was dubbed the Mission Interests Committee (MIC). David L. Miller and Eli Helmuth, both of Partridge, served as the secretary and treasurer, respectively.⁴⁴ In 1953, the MIC organized the first voluntary service unit for the Amish Church at Hillcrest Home in Harrison, Arkansas. Hillcrest Home was an assisted living center for the elderly. The county owned the facility while the church provided personnel. Hillcrest Home was the Church’s first step into the mission field.⁴⁵

At the national level, the 1950s also witnessed an unprecedented interest in higher education among the Amish. During that time, more than three dozen Amish men and women attended college. Goshen College and Eastern Mennonite College received most of these students. The majority of Amish college students studied nursing, pre-medicine, education, or Bible in hopes of performing future service for the community or world.⁴⁶ In the coming years, Amish young people would not only have the interest, but the ability and skills to engage in mission work.

⁴³ Quoted in Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁵ Graber, 11.

⁴⁶ Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 27.

Souls, Cars, and Division

In 1953, the city of Hutchinson, Kansas witnessed the emerging Amish interest in evangelism when the Brunk Revivals came to town. George R. Brunk II and his brother Lawrence held tent revivals at the fairgrounds in downtown Hutchinson. The Brunks' father had been a Mennonite bishop who advocated Sunday schools during America's "Third Great Awakening" of the late nineteenth century. The brothers preached a message of salvation, spiritual renewal, and Christian service that was directed at Mennonites but well received by much of the Amish community. To accommodate the many Amish, buses carried people between Partridge and the Hutchinson fairgrounds.⁴⁷ One four-year-old Amish girl, sensing the importance of the event, even dressed her pet cat in doll clothes to "get her ready for the Brunk Revivals."⁴⁸

Tent revivals exposed Amish laity to worship styles and theological concepts not previously acceptable in Amish circles. According to Myron Augsburg, a Mennonite evangelist who toured at the same time as the Brunk brothers, the revivals "brought an emphasis on assurance of salvation and on personal infilling of the Holy Spirit and a new understanding and experience of God's grace."⁴⁹

Among these concepts, the Protestant doctrine of assurance of salvation was the most controversial. The doctrine holds that the individual can know if she is saved by examining the "inner witness" of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, the Amish maintained that "eternal life was God's gift to those who persevered in a lifelong reliance upon God's grace."⁵⁰ To claim an assurance of salvation struck most Amish as arrogant. Furthermore, if someone knew that their

⁴⁷ David L. Miller.

⁴⁸ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview by author, notes of phone conversation, Arlington, Kans., 10 May 2006.

⁴⁹ Jim Bishop, "In-tent on proclaiming the whole gospel," *The Mennonite*, 4 no. 45 (4 December 2001): 11.

⁵⁰ Nolt, *History of the Amish*, 316.

soul was right with God, they would feel less incentive to seek God or lead a holy life.⁵¹ This doctrine also seemed to place too much emphasis on Christ's atonement for sins. To most traditional Amish, Christ was primarily a *Wegweiser* (one who shows the way), not simply an atoning sacrifice.⁵²

Unlike Protestant groups that emphasize saving the souls of individuals, the Amish faith and way of life (the two are inseparable) are primarily concerned with obedience to Scripture and community. According to John Hostetler, "The choice put before the congregation is to obey or die. To disobey the church is to die. To obey the church and strive for "full fellowship"—i.e., complete harmony with the order of the church—is to have *lebendige Hoffnung*, a living hope of salvation." Therefore, instead of knowing the state of one's salvation, the Amish put their "faith in God, obey the order of the church, and patiently hope for the best."⁵³

The Amish understanding of salvation is deeply rooted in the traditional Anabaptist concept of the "brotherhood-church." This Anabaptist approach to redemption differs from both Catholic and Protestant theology. Catholics maintain that believers receive salvation from God through the Church and its ordained priests tasked with dispensing the sacraments. Protestants abolished the Catholic intermediaries and assert that every person can enjoy a direct relationship with God, wherein it is the individual's responsibility to work out their own redemption. In contrast, traditional Anabaptists believed that only together with his brother can man truly come to know Christ. According to Robert Friedmann, "To [the Anabaptist,] brotherhood is not merely an ethical adjunct to Christian theological thinking but an integral

⁵¹ John R. Renno, *A Brief History of the Amish Church in Belleville*, (Danville, Pa.: John R. Renno, [1976]), 21.

⁵² John A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

condition for any genuine restoration of God's image in man (which after all is the deepest meaning of redemption)."⁵⁴

Assurance of salvation, therefore, not only smacked of arrogance, it threatened the very fabric of most Amish communities by introducing Protestant values of self-determination and individual faith. Many communities reacted harshly to the threat and applied the ban and excommunication to its adherents. For example, the Old Order Amish of Belleville, Pennsylvania forced several families (including ministers) out of the church for believing in the assurance of salvation. Eventually, these families joined a local Holdeman congregation where they maintained conservative community standards but embraced the belief of assurance of salvation.⁵⁵

The reaction among the Partridge Amish was different. While tent revivals did much to raise a dangerous interest in mission work, the response to their corresponding theology was surprisingly mild. Unlike other communities, the doctrine of assurance of salvation was not new to the Partridge community. Members had attended the revival meetings of other Protestant denominations for years. Even ministers like Willie Wagler traveled to Pretty Prairie, Kansas to attend revival meetings as early as 1951.⁵⁶

Proponents of the assurance of salvation also came from within the Amish community. One of its most controversial advocates was minister David A. Miller, of Thomas, Oklahoma. "Oklahoma Dave" traveled between Old Order Amish communities in the early 1950s, preaching a "pulpit-pounding" and "Holy Ghost-filled" message that included topics like the

⁵⁴ Robert Friedmann, *The Theology of Anabaptism*, (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973), 81.

⁵⁵ Renno, 23. Despite their plain dress, church discipline, use of the ban and practice of nonresistance, "Holdeman beliefs pertaining to the supernatural, the Bible, salvation, and eternal destiny are similar to those of evangelical Protestants." For more on the Holdemans—or Church of God in Christ, Mennonite—see, P. G. Hiebert, Clarence Hiebert and Otis E. Hochstetler, "Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (CGC)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, available at <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/C487ME.html>, Internet, accessed 10 April 2008.

⁵⁶ Willie W. Wagler, personal diary, in the possession of Orpha Miller, 5 March 1951.

assurance of salvation, sin and repentance, and mission work.⁵⁷ Miller's revivalist message made him an unwelcome guest in many congregations, and during one particularly controversial preaching tour through the eastern United States he was excommunicated from the Amish of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.⁵⁸ But Miller was well received in the Partridge community and even served with Elam Hochstetler as interim bishop of the Center church immediately following the split until Amos Nisly was ordained in May of 1959.⁵⁹

Surprisingly, Oklahoma Dave was not the first Amish minister to preach to the Partridge community about the importance of individual salvation. In addition to organizing the Partridge community's Sunday school program, Daniel "Doddy" Mast was an early Amish proponent of the belief that the state of one's soul could be known. Mast preached regularly on the assurance of salvation during his time as minister from 1914 to 1930.⁶⁰ Despite having no formal education, Mast read widely and wrote many articles for the Amish publication, *Herold der Wahrheit*.⁶¹ His extensive writings made numerous references to the importance of "concern for the salvation of others" and the joy of "perfect assurance" that one is saved.⁶² Mast's influences lay far outside the traditional wellspring of Anabaptist writers. He held Charles Spurgeon and John Wesley in high regard and referenced them in several articles.⁶³ For example, "I used much of Wesley's material...I doubt, if I had ever undertaken, or thought of going through the entire Sermon on the Mount, had I not read Wesley's writings."⁶⁴ It seems likely that Mast's interest in the assurance of salvation came from these or other Protestant leaders.

⁵⁷ Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 21.

⁵⁸ Ibid. and Kraybill, 265.

⁵⁹ David Wagler, 29.

⁶⁰ John Mast, interview by author, tape recording, Hutchinson, Kans., 30 July 2007.

⁶¹ David Wagler, 12.

⁶² Daniel E. Mast, 9 and 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 165 and 460.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 461.

Although the split at Partridge encompassed arguments over mission work, education, and Wednesday evening meetings, cars became emblematic of the entire division. As Elmer Yoder noted, “[a]utomobiles became the scapegoat.”⁶⁵

Traditionally, Amish communities rejected automobiles due to the threats they posed to Amish culture. The mobility afforded by automobiles “weakened interdependent family ties” and resulted in more time away from home. The expense of owning and maintaining vehicles resulted in their reputation as status symbols; objects that threatened the Amish beliefs of Christian stewardship and humility. While car ownership was a clear taboo, riding in cars or hiring drivers was often allowed and recognized as necessary.⁶⁶

It was out of necessity that, in the autumn of 1952, Perry L. Miller became the first member of the Partridge Amish community to drive a vehicle. Miller received the church’s permission because childhood polio left him with an injured leg, and it proved difficult to travel via horse and buggy to the school where he taught.⁶⁷ Also in 1952, several young Amish men began serving their alternative service as conscientious objectors. Because the men were stationed in large cities far from home, the ministers gave them permission to drive cars registered in the name of a Plainview member.⁶⁸

Financial factors also led to car ownership. According to a document prepared by the group that would go on to split from the Amish, cars were necessary because “there was not room for many of the young people on the farms.”⁶⁹ New, non-farm businesses often required trucks for deliveries. In 1956, Menno Nisly bought three trucks in order to service a trash route

⁶⁵ Elmer S. Yoder, *The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches* (Hartville, Oh.: Diakonia Ministries, 1987), 134.

⁶⁶ Nolt, *History of the Amish*, 260.

⁶⁷ David Wagler, 24.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Amish Mennonite Directory 2000, United States and Canada*, (Millersburg, Oh.: Abana Books, 2000), 90.

he purchased in Hutchinson. In 1957, Menno and his brother Melvin bought another truck and were informed they could not take part in communion.⁷⁰

Despite official opposition to trucks and cars, there was a general sense that trucks were more acceptable because, like tractors, they could serve as farm machinery. Therefore, some members bought trucks and drove them like cars while other members bought cars and modified them to be more like trucks by removing seats and installing boxes or removing doors. These stripped down vehicles were called “hoopies.” Also in 1957, Enos J. Miller bought a car for his sons to drive to their jobs in Hutchinson. He said that he “wasn’t going to beat around the bush by making a hoopie.” That fall he was not allowed to take part in communion.⁷¹

Though less obvious than the aversion to automobiles, opposition to mission tendencies in the Amish Church also existed from the very beginning. Even the Wednesday evening meetings proved contentious as community members made distinctions between “meeting” and “non-meeting” people.⁷² Opponents accused meeting-goers of elevating mission work to inappropriate levels. Though not opposed to mission work *per se*, they found the costs of mission work unacceptable. In the eyes of their detractors, people who wanted to engage in mission work were also “100% agreed that they wanted cars.”⁷³ One witness described the debate this way:

“Opponents said [mission work] would speed up the acculturation process to unacceptable levels by taking people off the land ...and alter[ing] the winsome witness of a disciplined, peaceful, set-apart rural community...The proponents of increased mission work cited the Great Commission [Matthew 28:16-20] repeatedly, noting that this imperative carried us beyond visits to local

⁷⁰ David Wagler, 25.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Harley Wagler.

⁷³ John Mast.

retirement homes and sending young men into alternative service. The horse and buggy were no longer adequate to meet this clarion call.”⁷⁴

In addition to the terms “meeting” and “non-meeting,” many labels developed within the Partridge community to distinguish between the two groups. Supporters of the mission movement were called “goodies” (for their perceived self-righteousness), “Elamites” (after movement organizer Elam Hochstetler), and later “Green Dodgers” (for their propensity to drive green Dodge cars).⁷⁵ The opponents of the movement received labels like “East Siders” and “wild ones.”⁷⁶ “East Sider” was an affectionate term for the Amish community on the east side of Reno County.⁷⁷ Few people in that community supported the mission movement.

As the schism between the two groups became more pronounced, the church ministers found themselves facing the daunting task of leading the congregation out of this turmoil. Bishop John D. Yoder and ministers David L. Miller, Amos Nisly, and Willie Wagler began holding weekly meetings to explore all courses of action. One option the church leaders discussed was for the entire Amish Church to join the Conservative Church. Eventually, the ministers rejected this idea because Plainview was not strict enough, and they did not care for the idea of joining a previously existing congregation. Another option was to join the Beachy Amish fellowship of churches. But lingering suspicion of Beachy Amish sincerity of purpose remained. Furthermore, there was unease about joining a conference dominated by churches from the East.⁷⁸

In the numerous attempts to reconcile the two sides, the consistent sticking point proved to be automobiles. Finally, someone suggested using the “lot” to determine if cars

⁷⁴ Harley Wagler.

⁷⁵ David L. Miller.

⁷⁶ Harley Wagler.

⁷⁷ Growth in the Partridge Amish church led to the formation of two church districts in 1916—East District and West District. In 1942, West District split into North and South Districts. Nolt, Lecture Handout.

⁷⁸ David Wagler, 28.

should or should not be allowed.⁷⁹ This approach was seriously pursued until Bishop John D. Yoder declared that he could no longer support this decision or attend further meetings with the other ministers; diplomatic options had been exhausted. He requested that the split be conducted as peacefully as possible.⁸⁰

Approximately two-thirds of the community supported a mission-oriented church and one-third wished to remain Old Order Amish. Yoder proposed that two of the church districts explore change, while the third remain committed to tradition.⁸¹ Wagler, Miller, and Nisly agreed to join the mission-minded group while Yoder stayed with the Old Order Amish. Yoder announced at church in September of 1958 that those families who wished to remain Amish could join him for worship in two weeks. All but eight families from East District joined him; coincidentally, all but eight families from North and South Districts chose to leave the Old Order Amish.⁸²

Consequences in the Two Churches

The new church came to be known as Center Amish Mennonite Church (“Center”). Initially they met in the Amish Sunday school building, but their 130 members easily filled the small structure. In 1959 Center built a new church house a half-mile east of the old Sunday school building.⁸³ The physical building was a symbol of the new group’s outward focus. In order to be visible to the rest of the world, they had to do away with meeting in members’ homes. A building gave interested parties a place to go if they became curious about Amish

⁷⁹ The “lot” is a method of selection and decision making that is based upon the Acts 1:23-26 account of the apostles “casting lots” to determine Judas’ successor. For more on the lot see Hostetler, 110.

⁸⁰ David L. Miller.

⁸¹ Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 30.

⁸² David Wagler, 29.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Mennonite faith. The church building also silently caused a compartmentalization of religion. Instead of “a life totally devoted to worship, where even our dwellings are consecrated objects,” the new church created a single, community space of worship.⁸⁴

Center Church quickly began holding services in English. This too was a result of the desire to be accessible to the broader world. It also resulted in the adoption of new styles of singing; hymns and gospel songs replaced slow Amish songs.⁸⁵ There was some opposition to the decision, though. In hopes that German not be completely abandoned, Raymond Wagler purchased a large wooden sign with a German-language phrase to be hung in the new church building.⁸⁶

Just as they feared losing their language, members of the new church feared losing many of their traditional community standards. The creation of a new church necessitated rearticulating *Ordnung* to prevent future “drift.” Unlike their Amish cousins, leaders at Center Church chose to write down the expectations of members. The church debated acceptable wrist watches—leather vs. metal straps—and the types of cars members could drive—only “plain colored cars, duly depreciated to reflect the owner’s modesty, and no radios.”⁸⁷ Once the congregation agreed on their standards, all persons seeking membership in the church had to sign the list of rules.⁸⁸

Within several years of its creation, the Center Church began associating with the Beachy Amish. Traveling Beachy Amish ministers received invitations to preach, and youth from Center mingled with Beachy Amish youth groups. Also significant was the Mission Interest Committee’s increasing cooperation with Amish Mennonite Aid (AMA), a similar

⁸⁴ Quotation and paraphrase from Harley Wagler.

⁸⁵ David Wagler, 30.

⁸⁶ Harley Wagler.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ David Wagler, 30.

mission organization run by the Beachy Amish. Center's new bishop, Amos Nisly, advocated closer ties with the Beachy Amish because of the opportunities for "more accountability and a wider network of leadership resources."⁸⁹ But not everyone supported such a move. Many people grew up with the understanding that the Beachys were interested in conveniences (like cars) and not in "spirituality."⁹⁰ An MIC supporter asked in 1964, "Will the vigor of the [mission] movement be lost as the movement merges with a group less spiritually dynamic?"⁹¹ Nonetheless, over the next decade, members of Center Amish Mennonite Church increasingly referred to themselves as Beachy Amish.⁹²

The church split of 1958 divided immediate and extended families. Harley Wagler recalled the "somewhat awkward situation" of remaining in the Old Order Amish Church while his father attended Center. Additionally, Wagler's father's extended family joined the Beachy Amish, while his mother's relatives remained Old Order. The proximity of the two congregations increased the rate of acculturation among the Amish because, in Wagler's experience, family ties and practical considerations typically overrode group doctrine.⁹³

In most Amish communities that experienced similar splits, the church that remained Old Order became more religiously sectarian. Technological changes were de-coupled from religious conservatism and, paradoxically, became easier to negotiate. This meant that new technologies could be embraced without changing the community's theology. While today's Amish may have more appliances or dress differently from their counterparts in the 1950s,

⁸⁹ Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 32.

⁹⁰ David L. Miller.

⁹¹ Noah Hochstetler, "A History of the Amish Mission Board: The Mission Interest [sic] Committee," (unpublished student paper, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.), 6, quoted in Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 33.

⁹² David L. Miller.

⁹³ Harley Wagler.

they are generally less likely to attend services of other denominations or engage in voluntary service assignments.⁹⁴

In Partridge, however, Bishop John Mast approached both facets of change with moderation. Mast's leadership style resulted in his advice being sought out by young Amish communities that desired "less stringent discipline." For example, within a few years of the split, Mast's congregation approved of the use of telephones.⁹⁵ Some Beachy Amish even perceived that the split gave the Old Orders a "fresh vision" of the importance of adaptation and mission work.⁹⁶

Despite the general sense of goodwill between the two groups, some tension remained. To this day, the Old Orders perceive that individuals in the Beachy Amish church still look down on them as less "spiritually-minded." The Old Orders also felt frustrated with the group from Center for "not be[ing] satisfied" with what they had in the Amish church. They perceived that along the way Amish leaders made many concessions in the interpretation of *Ordnung* in the hopes of keeping the group unified.⁹⁷

The split also affected the demographics of the remaining Amish church. Because most families involved in the mission movement were young, the Old Orders were left with "no babies in the crowd—everything was quiet." In fact, while Center was growing very rapidly, the Amish did not have a newborn in their congregation for about twelve years.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Nolt, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 35.

⁹⁵ Harley Wagler.

⁹⁶ David L. Miller.

⁹⁷ John Mast.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The Protestant and Anabaptist Reformations, the schisms of the 1690s and the 1860s, and the Beachy Amish and Conservative Mennonite splits of the early twentieth century helped define the process of Amish division in the 1950s. For example, the early Anabaptists' split from Protestantism rejected extreme hierarchy and placed much control of religion in the laity. This same belief drove the grassroots mission movement in the mid-twentieth century. Organizations like MIC and even national mission conferences resulted from the work of laypeople.

Like previous church divisions, the split in the 1950s hinged heavily on issues of Biblical interpretation. The centrality of Jesus' teachings in Anabaptist theology had resulted in Anabaptist separation from the world and heavy emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount (a sermon by Jesus, found in Matthew 5-7, interpreted as outlining the core tenets of Christianity). During the mission movement, supporters argued that one could not simply read the first half of Matthew; the Great Commission at the end of the gospel required sharing Christianity with all of humanity.

Jakob Ammann's staunch support of the use of *Meidung* was a contentious issue for the Amish of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For Ammann, fear of acculturation necessitated a strong response. The 1860s' schism and the Beachy Amish split of the 1920s left the Old Order Amish even more committed to preventing cultural change. The mission movement made a new claim in response to this traditionalism: God has asked us to spread His Word, some changes must take place to accommodate that mission. As a result, the Old Order Amish had to grapple with both technological and religious changes.

The events of the 1950s' Amish mission movement demonstrate the interconnectedness of faith, society, and economic realities across vast denominational boundaries. While attempting to remain separate from the world, some Amish leaders and laity during the decades prior to 1950 adopted theologies and systems of belief from mainstream Protestantism. The social and religious revivals of the 1950s also directly influenced Amish church members. Finally, regardless of their separation from society, economic pressures resulting from American urbanization caused many young Amish men to seek work off the farm. This created a need for more efficient farm technologies and new forms of transportation.

The story of the birth of the Amish mission movement illustrates the Amish Church's rich history and constant formulation of religious identity. With their rural lifestyles and old-fashioned garb, the Amish are often portrayed in popular culture as relics of previous centuries. In reality, what it means to be Amish is in constant flux. Like all faiths, the Amish grapple with contemporary issues that threaten to change the face, and the soul, of their religion.

Works Cited

- Amish Mennonite Directory 2000, United States and Canada*. Millersburg, Oh.: Abana Books, 2000.
- Beachy, Alvin J. "The Rise and Development of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 29, no. 2 (1955).
- Bender, Harold S. "Amish Division." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1953. Available from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A4584ME.html>. Internet. Accessed 16 May 2006.
- Bishop, Jim. "In-tent on proclaiming the whole gospel," *The Mennonite* 4 no. 45 (4 December 2001): 11.
- Friedmann, Robert. *The Theology of Anabaptism*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973.
- Graber, Harvey. "Spiritual Awakening in the Old Order Amish Church." Unpublished paper, Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Ind., 1956.
- Hostetler, John A. *Amish Society*. 4th ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Hiebert, P. G., Clarence Hiebert and Otis E. Hochstetler. "Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (CGC)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. Available at <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/C487ME.html>. Internet. Accessed 10 April 2008.
- Klaassen, Walter. "Anabaptism." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. Available at <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/a533me.html>. Internet. Accessed 16 May 2006.
- Kraybill, Donald B. *The Riddle of the Amish Culture*. Revised edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Mast, Daniel E. *Salvation Full and Free*. Translated and edited by John B. Mast. Inman, Kans.: Salem Publishing House, 1955.
- Mast, John. Interview by author, 30 July 2007, Hutchinson, Kans. Tape recording.
- Miller, David L., former member of Partridge Amish and current Beachy-Amish minister. Interview by author, 25 April 2006, Partridge, Kans. Tape recording.
- Miller, Ivan J. "Conservative Mennonite Conference." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. Available at <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/c6676me.html>. Internet. Accessed 18 May 2006.

Miller, Orpha (Wagler), former member of Partridge Amish and current Beachy-Amish.
Interview by author, 24 February 2006, Arlington, Kans. Notes of phone conversation.

_____, Interview by author, 10 May 2006, Arlington, Kans. Notes of phone conversation.

_____, Interview by author, 17 July 2007, Arlington, Kans. Tape recording.

_____, Personal diary, 1948, In the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller.

Nolt, Steven M. "The Amish 'Mission Movement' and the Reformulation of Amish Identity in the Twentieth Century." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 75, no. 1 (2001).

_____, *A History of the Amish*. Revised and updated. Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2003.

_____, Lecture handout. "Plain Diversity: Amish Life in a Changing World." Presented at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Hillsboro, Kans., May 5, 2007.

Renno, John R. *A Brief History of the Amish Church in Belleville*. Danville, Pa.: John R. Renno, [1976].

Wagler, David. "History and Change of the Amish of Reno County, Kansas." Unpublished paper, Mennonite Library and Archives: North Newton, Kans., 1968.

Wagler, Harley, former member of Partridge Amish. Interview by author, 3 May 2006, Nizhni Novgorod, Russia. Email.

Wagler, Willie W. Personal diary. 1948, In the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller.

_____, Personal diary, 1951, In the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller.

Yoder, Elmer S. *The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches*. Hartville, Oh.: Diakonia Ministries, 1987.

Yoder, Paton, *Tradition and Transition: Amish Mennonites and Old Order Amish 1800-1900*. Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, vol. 31. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991.

**SOULS, CARS, AND DIVISION: THE AMISH MISSION MOVEMENT OF THE 1950s
AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE AMISH COMMUNITY OF PARTRIDGE, KANSAS**

by

Peter D. Miller
Bethel College

April 2008

John Horsch Mennonite History Essay Contest, Class II
Second Place