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Souls, Cars, and Division: The Amish Mission Movement of the 1950s and Its Effects on the Amish Community of Partridge, Kansas

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Abstract: Though often perceived as static, Amish identity is subject to change. The mid-twentieth century was a period of notable change. The recent experience of World War II, American religious revival movements, and economic pressures all placed pressure upon Amish communities to adapt. This paper highlights the experience of the Amish community of Partridge, Kansas, where these pressures and widespread interest in mission work eventually led to a church division in the 1950s. This paper explores the contributing factors to that split and examines the reactions on both sides to the division.

Keywords: Amish; Mennonite; Amish-Mennonite; religious identity; Kansas; Anabaptist; revival movements

*Affiliation at time of the paper's initial development (2008)

INTRODUCTION

“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 mis-

sion movement that stirred a revival within the church and introduced faith and worship practices of other Christian groups. 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 missions 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

¹Harvey Graber, “Spiritual Awakening in the Old Order Amish Church” (unpublished paper, Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Ind., 1956), 25.

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Amish-Mennonites. 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.

In the following account, I have worked 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” (Nolt 2003). 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 am not a member of either the Amish or Beachy 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, I can con-

stantly examine my work and minimize this tendency toward polarity.

PRIOR CHURCH DIVISIONS

The Old Order/Amish-Mennonite schism of the mid-nineteenth century set the stage for the Partridge division nearly 90 years later. 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 Amish Church. Among other issues in focus were Sunday school, the use of meeting houses, and even technological advances in agriculture. The *Diener Versammlungen* occasioned the first church-wide discussions of expected behavior or “*Ordnung*.”² Previously, *Ordnung* was lived, not taught. Suddenly, the Church found itself 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 (Nolt 2003, 160). 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.³

With Old Order and Amish-Mennonite streams now running parallel in the Amish tradition, the Amish-Mennonites became an obvious church for dissatisfied Old Orders to join. This was especially true of two Amish-Mennonite groups that formed later, the Conservative Amish-Mennonite Conference (1910) and the Beachy Amish-Men-

²“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 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 (2001), 112.

³Further descriptions of the *Diener Versammlungen* are seen in Yoder (1991), 137-52.

nonites (1927), both of whom were stricter in practice than the other Amish-Mennonites. In the spectrum of Anabaptism, Amish-Mennonites fit somewhere between the Mennonite Church and the Old Order Amish Church.

The Beachy Amish-Mennonites took their name from Moses M. Beachy, an early twentieth century bishop in the Old Order Amish Church of Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Beachy believed the *Meidung* should be used sparingly—especially on people transferring into the local Conservative (Amish-)Mennonite church.⁴ 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 (Beachy 1955, 120-21). Though he agreed with Beachy, Swartzendruber hoped another split could be 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 (Beachy 1955, 128-30). This led many Old Order Amish to believe that Beachy’s followers were primarily motivated by their interest in technological conveniences.⁵

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”).⁶ 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.⁷ 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. (Wagler 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 existing Church structures. Furthermore, as the process took considerable time, individuals who eventually became discouraged by the Amish congregation’s rate of change could join the Conservative Church. The stage was set for a decade of debate about the future of the Old Order Amish Church.

COMMUNITY HISTORY AND INFLUENCES FROM WITHOUT

Daniel E. “Doddy” Mast, an important early leader in the Partridge Amish church, 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 Old Order Amish churches in North America (Yoder 1991, 279). 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

⁴For more on Conservative Mennonites see Miller (1989).

⁵David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

⁶Willie W. Wagler, personal diary, in the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller, 1948.

⁷Steven M. Nolt, lecture handout, “Plain Diversity: Amish Life in a Changing World” (presented at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies: Hillsboro, KS, May 5, 2007).

was later translated as *Salvation Full and Free*.⁸ 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” (Graber 1956, 22).

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, MS, the previous summer, Wagler “felt [she] should learn more” about the Bible and general education.⁹ 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 (Wagler 1968, 18).

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 (Wagler 1968, 17). 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” (Hershberger, et al., 1978, 15). Starting in 1951, Mahlon Wagler had his wish; the Partridge Amish organized a local Mission Interests Committee. John and Elizabeth Bender were sent to Gulfport, Mississippi and became the first Amish mission workers supported by the Partridge Amish Church (Wagler 1968, 17).

In addition to voluntary service and education, the Amish experience during World War II 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 II. These men were sent 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 (Nolt 2001, 11).

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.¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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 (Graber 1956, 16-17).

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, 1948.¹² Subsequent meetings came to be called “Young People’s Meetings” and were held every two 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).¹³ Elam Hochstetler (a future leader of the mission movement) reported

⁸ Eli J. Bontrager, introduction to Mast (1955), 6-7.

⁹ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview, 17 July 2007.

¹⁰ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

¹¹ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

¹² Orpha (Wagler) Miller, personal diary, in the possession of Orpha (Wagler) Miller, 1948.

¹³ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview, 17 July 2007.

being very impressed by a visit to the Partridge community's Bible study group in February 1950 (Nolt 2001, 14).

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."¹⁴ This was due in large part to the fact that Young People's Meetings remained an initiative of the laity.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Although "Christian Courtship" was sometimes addressed from the pulpit, the August 31, 1949 mid-week meeting was the first time the topic was led by young members of the church and discussed in an open forum.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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 publication *Herold der Wahrheit*, and a church member with a large hospital bill.¹⁹ 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 Ec-

uador.²⁰ 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.²¹

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 (Nolt 2001, 15-16). In response, Maniaci became a "vocal, aggressive voice" in "waking up the collective conscience."²²

Russell Maniaci organized the "First Amish Mission Conference" August 6-8, 1950. The conference met at the Jonas Gingerich farm outside Kalona, Iowa. Between 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" (Nolt 2001, 17).

The first mission conference was such a success that 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

¹⁴ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ [Record of Young People's Meetings] and Willie W. Wagler, diary, 1948.

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

¹⁸ [Record of Young People's Meetings].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Quotation and paraphrase from Harley Wagler.

²¹ Maniaci left Catholicism because of "his parents' deaths and his horrific World War I battle experience" (Nolt 2001, 15).

²² David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

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 (Nolt 2001, 19). 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 (Graber 1956, 11).

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 (Nolt 2001, 27). In the coming years, Amish young people would not only have the interest but the ability and skills to engage in mission work.

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.²³ 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.”²⁴

Tent revivals exposed Amish laity to worship styles and theological concepts not previously ac-

ceptable in Amish circles. Supporters of the mission movement 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. 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” (Bishop 2001, 11).

Among these concepts, the Protestant doctrine of assurance of salvation was the most controversial. The doctrine holds that the individual can know if he or 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” (Nolt 2003, 16). To claim an assurance of salvation struck most Amish as arrogant. Furthermore, if someone knew that their soul was right with God, he or she would feel less incentive to seek God or lead a holy life (Renno 1976, 21). 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 (Hostetler 1993, 77).

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 Hostetler (1993), “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” (p. 77)

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

²³ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

²⁴ Orpha (Wagler) Miller, interview, 10 May 2006.

person can enjoy a direct relationship with God, wherein it is the individual's responsibility to work out his or her 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 condition for any genuine restoration of God's image in man (which after all is the deepest meaning of redemption) (Friedmann 1973, 81)."

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 (Renno 1976, 23).²⁵

The reaction among the Partridge Amish was different. While tent revivals did much to raise an 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 1951.²⁶

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, OK. "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 assurance of salvation, sin and repentance, and mission work. 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, PA (Nolt 2001, 21). But Miller was well received in the Partridge community and even served with Elam Hochstetler, an influential Beachy bishop from Goshen, IN, as interim bishop of the Center church immediately following the split until Amos Nisly was ordained in May of 1959 (Wagler 1968, 29).

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 1930.²⁷ 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 (Mast 1955, 9, 12). 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 (pp. 165, 460). 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" (p. 461) It seems likely that Mast's interest in the assurance of salvation came from these or other Protestant leaders.

Although the split at Partridge encompassed arguments over mission work, education, and Wednesday evening meetings, cars became emblematic of the entire division. As historian Elmer Yoder (1987) noted, "[a]utomobiles became the scapegoat" (p. 134)

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 result-

²⁵ 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 Hiebert (1989).

²⁶ Willie W. Wagler, personal diary, in the possession of Orpha Miller, 5 March 1951.

²⁷ John Mast, interview, 30 July 2007.

ed in their reputation as status symbols; objects that threatened the Amish beliefs of Christian stewardship and humility. While car ownership was clearly not permitted, riding in cars or hiring drivers was often allowed and recognized as necessary (Nolt 2003, 260).

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. 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 (Wagler 1968, 24).

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" (Miller 2000, 90). New, non-farm businesses often required trucks for deliveries. In 1956, Menno Nisly bought three trucks in order to service a trash route he purchased in Hutchinson. In 1957, Menno and his brother Melvin bought another truck and were informed they could not take part in communion (Wagler 1968, 25).

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 (Wagler 1968, 25).

Though less obvious than the aversion to automobiles, opposition to mission tendencies in the Amish Church also existed. Even the Wednesday evening meetings proved contentious as community members made distinctions between "meet-

ing" and "non-meeting" people.²⁸ 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."²⁹ 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 retirement homes and sending young men into alternative service. The horse and buggy were no longer adequate to meet this clarion call.³⁰

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).³¹ The opponents of the movement received labels like "East Siders" and "wild ones."³² "East Sider" was an affectionate term for the Amish community on the east side of Reno County.³³ 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

²⁸ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

²⁹ John Mast, interview, 30 July 2007.

³⁰ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

³¹ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

³² Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

³³ 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.

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 churches. But lingering suspicion of the Beachys remained. Were they simply Amish with cars or were they sincerely committed to mission work and revival? Furthermore, there was unease about joining a conference dominated by churches from the East (Wagler 1968, 28).

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 should or should not be allowed.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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 remained committed to tradition (Nolt 2001, 30). 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 (Wagler 1968, 29).

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 (Wagler 1968, 30). 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-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.³⁶

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 (Wagler 1968, 30). 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.³⁷

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 and distribute 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.”³⁸ Once the congregation agreed on their standards, all persons seek-

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

³⁶ Quotation and paraphrase from Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

³⁷ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

³⁸ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

ing membership in the church had to sign the list of rules (Wagler 1968, 30).

Within several years of its creation, the Center Church began associating with the Beachy Amish-Mennonites. Traveling Beachy ministers received invitations to preach, and youth from Center mingled with Beachy youth groups. Also significant was the Mission Interests Committee's increasing cooperation with Amish-Mennonite Aid (AMA), a similar mission organization run by the Beachys. Center's new bishop, Amos Nisly, advocated closer ties with the Beachys because of the opportunities for "more accountability and a wider network of leadership resources" (Nolt 2001, 32). 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."³⁹ 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?" (Hochstetler n.d.). Nonetheless, over the next decade, members of Center Amish-Mennonite Church increasingly referred to themselves as Beachy Amish-Mennonite.⁴⁰

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-Mennonites, 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.⁴¹

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, they are generally less

likely to attend services of other denominations or engage in voluntary service assignments (Nolt 2001, 35).

In Partridge, however, Amish 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 ownership of telephones.⁴² Some Beachys even perceived that the split gave the Old Orders a "fresh vision" of the importance of adaptation and mission work.⁴³

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 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.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

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). The mission movement made a new claim: God has asked us to spread His Word and some changes must take place to accommodate that mission. As

³⁹ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

⁴⁰ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

⁴¹ Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

⁴² Harley Wagler, interview, 3 May 2006.

⁴³ David L. Miller, interview, 25 April 2006.

⁴⁴ John Mast, interview, 30 July 2007.

⁴⁵ John Mast, interview, 30 July 2007.

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 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 evangelical 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.

Today, three Beachy churches occupy the Partridge region: Center Amish-Mennonite, Cedar Crest Amish-Mennonite, and Arlington Amish-Mennonite. All three are solidly within the Beachy Amish-Mennonite affiliation, though each has taken on a distinct identity in personality and level of conservatism. All three are also active in missions. At one time or another, most foreign and domestic mission posts run by the Beachys have had Amish-Mennonites from Partridge serving.

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.

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