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## The 1955 Diener Beschluss: Text, Interpretation, Reception History, and Historiography

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# The 1955 Diener Beschluss: Text, Interpretation, Reception History, and Historiography

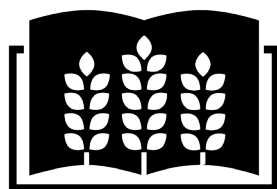
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**Abstract:** The contemporary diversity of the Amish is well attested by recent literature in the field of Amish studies. However, beyond Leroy Beachy's *Unser Leit*, insufficient attention has been given to the question of how this state of affairs came about. The most consequential date in the twentieth century is September 1955, when a Beschuß (statement) that was issued at a churchwide ministers' meeting ultimately divided the Old Order Amish into two separate, non-communing fellowships. Three important historical details about the meeting merit consideration: the document issued on the last day of the churchwide ministers' meeting circulates among the Amish in three different forms; the document itself was interpreted differently by attendees; and some of the attendees skipped the final day of the meeting when the official statement was presented by the seven-member bishop committee. After subjecting the extant forms of the ministerial decision to textual analysis, this essay interprets the meaning of the document in light of previous ministerial statements (issued in 1809, 1865, 1913, 1917, 1941, 1946, and 1953) and through its reception history among the Amish down to the present day, to sharpen the historiography of the Amish in North America in the twentieth century. [Abstract by author.]

**Keywords:** Beschuß; Amish; historiography; 1955; reception history; Andy Weaver; Old Order-mainstream; twentieth century



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## INTRODUCTION

From the time of the Great Schism in the 1850s and 1860s<sup>1</sup> until the middle of the following century, the Old Order Amish maintained a fairly unified ecclesiastical order in spite of their highly congregational form of church function.<sup>2</sup> This unity was not without its challenges, the emergence of a handful of conservative (Byler, Nebraska, Swartzentruber, and Troyer-Stutzman) factions<sup>3</sup> indicative that the Old Order did not experience complete unanimity even though the Great Schism removed the more liberal voices from the ecclesiastical conversation<sup>4</sup> by narrowing the acceptable range of opinions considerably. With these minor factions to the side, the vast majority of church districts fellowshipped with one another. These ties of fellowship existed within settlements and across both state lines and the international border between the United States and Canada. A critical practice that held all of these congregations together was the recognition of one another's disciplinary actions. But the unanimity that characterized Old Order Amish church life

since the Great Schism was shaken by a nationwide ministers' meeting in 1955. Although the meeting itself aimed at the more modest goal of resolving local issues in the Holmes-Wayne County (OH) settlement, the schism spread across North America as congregations took sides regarding three controversial matters:

1. May an Old Order Amish congregation disregard disciplinary action of an Amish church that broke fellowship with them?
2. May an Old Order Amish congregation remove, on their own, ecclesiastical discipline that was put in place by another congregation?
3. May an Amish person join a non-Amish but still non-resistant congregation without being excommunicated and shunned?

The side that answers "no" to all three questions and regularly cites the 1955 Beschluß (decision) as supporting their position was named after a charismatic young bishop from the Holmes County settlement that spearheaded the movement from its earliest days—Andy Weaver. Those who answered "yes" to one or more of these questions almost never cite the Beschluß and today are known as the Old Order-mainstream affiliation.<sup>5</sup> This essay aims to improve our historiography of the Amish in North America by documenting the ecclesiastical division that split the entire Old Order Amish church into two distinct non-communing groups and the continuing effects down to the present day.<sup>6</sup>

## TEXT

The 1955 Diener Beschluß is extant in three major forms. Two of the three forms suggest that exact textual reproduction should not be expected, especially since minor textual differences are not meant for polemical purposes and do not advance

<sup>1</sup> The authoritative account of the Great Schism is Paton Yoder, *Tradition & Transition: Amish Mennonites and Old Order Amish 1800-1900* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 115-203.

<sup>2</sup> A comparative introduction to the subject of ecclesiology is Steven B. Cowan, ed. *Who Runs the Church?: 4 Views on Church Government* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004). Roger Haight and James Nieman ("On the Dynamic Relationship Between Ecclesiology and Congregational Studies" *Theological Studies* 70 [2009]: 577-599) notes that, just as theological doctrines of churches with a congregational ecclesiology cannot be properly understood apart from congregations themselves, those congregations cannot be understood on their own, without "the formal discipline of ecclesiology to connect the beliefs and practices of each community to the wider tradition" (577).

<sup>3</sup> A primary goal of Leroy Beachy's *Unser Leit: The Story of the Amish* (vol. 2; Millersburg, OH: Goodly Heritage Books, 2011) is to tell the story of the divisions that occurred in the Holmes County (OH) settlement during the first half of the twentieth century. For details regarding the other small factions that emerged since the time of the Great Schism (the Byler and Nebraska Amish), see S. Duane Kauffman, *Mifflin County Amish and Mennonite Story 1791-1991* (Belleville, PA: Mifflin County Mennonite Historical Society, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Steven M. Nolt ("Who Are the Real Amish? Rethinking Diversity and Identity among a Separate People" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 82 [2008]: 386-87) theorizes the Amish as a "community in conversation."

<sup>5</sup> See Christopher G. Petrovich, "More Than Forty Amish Affiliations? Charting the Fault Lines." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 5(1):120-42.

<sup>6</sup> With the caveat that the small splinter groups that emerged before the 1955 division were not part of these happenings, are not significantly affected by the alteration of lines of fellowship, and do not carry these decisions, reactions, and counter-reactions in their collective memory because the 1955 Beschluß is not part of "their story."

any particular position advocated by the printer. The most significant difference between extant versions is the inclusion of a portion of an earlier statement of faith that now constitutes nearly half of the text in two of the three extant versions and has been a subject of dispute between the two sides that emerged from the schism in 1955.

Excluding introductory material and the names and signatures of the seven bishops that signed the document, the 1955 Diener Beschluß is quite brief: 166 words in the Joe Keim edition,<sup>7</sup> 176 words in the edition printed by Raber's Book Store,<sup>8</sup> and only 89 words in the edition printed in John M. Byler's *Alte Schreibens: Amish Documents and Record Series*.<sup>9</sup> In the Raber and Byler editions, this ministerial statement is divided into three articles. In the Keim edition, article numbers are omitted and the text is divided into four paragraphs.<sup>10</sup>

Differences between the Keim and Raber editions are mostly related to the employment of

contractions in Keim's form, slightly different ways of constructing German sentences, and the addition of "und lautet also" (at the end of the first sentence of the second article) and apparent mistakes related to copying or dictation in Raber's edition. The edition printed by Raber's Book Store is clearly inferior in quality, the misprint of the word gegründet as "gegr9ndet" [sic.] being the most obvious example.

The Byler edition is considerably shorter than the other two because it does not include the following paragraph (quoted from the Keim edition):

Es ist angesehen für haushalten mit Rat der Gemeinde mit dem Wort Gottes nach den Umständen; wenn ein Fall sollte vorkommen wo angesehen wird von den Diener und der Gemeinde für Bannwürdig; so soll Bann und Meidung gehalten werden von Diener und Glieder bis eine evangelische Buß und eine evangelische Aufnahme erzeugt oder beweist. Sollte derjenige meinen es wäre ihm Unrecht getan so soll Sein Umlaufen oder Hinterreden nicht angehört werden, sondern hinweisen auf Buß und Besserung.<sup>11</sup>

This text is a separate paragraph in the Keim edition (which doesn't have article numbers) but part of article 2 in the Raber's edition, where this material also forms a separate paragraph.

The texts are not transcribed word for word, nor detail given to exact spelling, excepting Byler's edition. This becomes apparent when the first article of each of the three editions is placed next to each other (the Byler edition, followed by the Keim edition, then the Raber's Book Store edition):

Byler: Was gearbeitet war durch geforderte Diener, und rath der gemeinde, und dasgleichen was

Keim: Was gearbeitet war durch geforderte Diener und Rat der Gemeinde und dasgleichen was

Raber's Was gearbeitet war durch geforderte Diener und Raht die Gemeinde und des gleichen was

<sup>7</sup>Mose W. Byler and Dannie C. Byler, eds., *Diener Beschlusen von 1568 – zu – 2006 und Eine Kurtze Bericht von Begebenheiten in die Alt Amishe Gemeinden in Yahren von 1999 – bis – 2014* (Gordonville, PA: Gordonville Print Shop, 2017).

<sup>8</sup>*Allgemeine Diener Versammlung Den 26-27-28 Sept. 1955* (Baltic, OH: Raber's Book Store, 1996). Sheets, Gregory, and Cory Anderson [transl.]. 2019. "An Account of the 1955 Ministerial Assembly in Holmes and Wayne Counties, OH: An English Translation of Joseph E. Peachey's Allgemeine Diener Versammlung Den 26, 27, 28, Sept. 1955 [General Ministerial Assembly, September 26th, 27th, and 28th, 1955]." *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 7(2):163-68.

<sup>9</sup>Sugarcreek, OH: Schlabach Printers, 2008.

<sup>10</sup>I have chosen these three because they are the editions most frequently used by Amish ministers today. I refer to the first text as the "Joe Keim" edition even though Mose W. Byler and Dannie C. Byler assembled the booklet, to not confuse it with the John M. Byler edition and because Bishop Keim is distributing the booklet so that others can understand his position in the recent dispute that split the Andy Weaver Amish and why he believes decisions in past ministerial meetings support his controversial position. For an allusion to this division, see Christopher G. Petrovich, "Technology in the Service of Community: Identity and Change Among the Andy Weaver Amish" *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88:1 (2014): 23-44. Mose and Danny are from the Mayville settlement which was started from New Wilmington (PA) in 1976. The edition printed by Raber's Book Store is the most frequently used text because it is a favored publisher among Andy Weaver Amish. John M. Byler is a noted Andy Weaver historian that printed the 1955 Diener Beschluß in its shorter form when collecting old Amish documents.

<sup>11</sup>Byler and Byler, *Diener Beschlusen*, 14.

Byler: gearbeitet war durch die Holmes County Diener solt gehalten werden.

Keim: gearbeitet war durch die Holmes County Diener solt gehalten werden.

Raber's: Gearbeitet war durch die Holmes Co., diener solt gehalten werden.

The people transcribing the 1955 Beschluß did not strive for precision the way that textual critics might expect, and thus very little should be read into these minor textual variations.<sup>12</sup> A verifiable example of considerable latitude in spelling is the booklet that John M. Byler cites as his source for the ministerial list—*Begebenheiten von die alte amischen gemeinde von Holmes und Wayne County, Ohio und Adams County, Indiana*. This is neither an accurate transcription of the title on the inside cover of the booklet (because it lacks ‘Von 1938 bis zu 1958’) nor the cover where the booklet is identified as *Begebenheiten Von Die Alte Amische Gemeinde Von Holmes Und Wayne Co. Ohio Und Adams Co., Ind.* When an editor spells the name of his own religious group differently on the inside of the cover (amischen) than on the cover itself (amishe), it is clear that exact transcription should not be expected. Instead, we should anticipate minor variations, and those variations should not be interpreted as a sign that the transcriber was trying to alter the meaning of the document.<sup>13</sup>

The most important textual question is the source—or, more likely, sources—of these three different editions. The Keim compilers do not identify their source(s). Since the Raber text is the only edition that includes the additional text, and includes it as a separate paragraph, the Keim

compilers are probably utilizing the Raber edition but fixing the grammar and removing the article numbers. It is hard to imagine the Keim compilers referring to the Byler edition (or the same source as the Byler edition) and then adding the paragraph from the Raber edition rather than just using the Raber edition itself. It is more likely that the Keim compilers felt that they should be accorded sufficient latitude, for example, to “update” the last phrase in the undisputed portion of article #2 to read “Seite 11, Vers 11” rather than “blatt 11 verse 71” as it appears in the Raber edition. Although the Keim booklet intends to prove the continuity from sixteenth-century Anabaptism down to the present time, including the recent split within the Andy Weaver churches, keeping the additional paragraph, and removing the article numbers don’t add value to that argument, and thus don’t seem to be intended for polemical reasons.<sup>14</sup>

In the “Foreward” to the copy printed by Raber’s Book Store, the printer notes his source as follows:

Zugeschrieben bei Joseph E. Peachey Belleville, Pa. und in den druck gegeben bei John Y. Schlabach Rt. 6, box 73, Millersburg, Ohio 44654.<sup>15</sup>

Based on the ministerial list compiled by Schlabach,<sup>16</sup> both he and Joseph E. Peachey attend-

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Wright Knust (“In Pursuit of a Singular Text: New Testament Textual Criticism and the Desire for the True Original” *Religion Compass* 2 [2008]: 180–194) raises interesting questions regarding the desire for a transcendent text, and the role that textual critics play in the construction of “true texts.”

<sup>13</sup> It is important to remember that textual history and reception history are not always distinct. Garrick V. Allen, in his analysis of the Apocalypse (“Textual History and Reception History: Exegetical Variation in the Apocalypse” 59 *Novum Testamentum* [2017]: 297–319), notes that scribal performance, both intentional alterations and unintentional slips, are indicative of reception. This is especially the case for texts that are part of a community’s memory but are not divinely given (such as the Apocalypse).

<sup>14</sup> Consult the conversation below about the second paragraph of the second article as an addition to the Beschluß. If the Keim compilers were trying to prove that this paragraph was part of the original, then, if anything, they would *not* want it to be set apart as a separate paragraph. Since the Keim edition cites John M. Byler’s interpretation of the 2006 Andy Weaver split, and since both they (including Bishop Joe Keim) and Byler appear to be on the same side of that division, the Byler and Keim editions are unlikely to be competing versions of the 1955 Beschluß. Thus, there is good reason to think that Byler’s edition is the most accurate and original because, in addition to textual reasons (that a shorter version of a text is likely to be the most original), if Byler was trying to prove that the traditional Andy Weaver position is correct, he would not want to publish an edition lacking the second paragraph of the second article, unless he felt restrained by the facts of the original document itself. At the same time that the Keim edition lacks “und lautet also,” the compilers are failing to note that the paragraph which follows is drawn from outside the text itself.

<sup>15</sup> “Transcribed by Joseph E. Peachey, Belleville, PA and published by John Y. Schlabach, Rt. 6, Box 73, Millersburg, Ohio 44654.”

<sup>16</sup> John Y. Schlabach, *Begebenheiten von die Alte Amische Ge-*



ed the ministerial meeting and thus were eyewitnesses of the proceedings. Schlabach was directly involved in the Orrville church matters as he was a church leader in that district, apparently sided with the Andy Weaver group in Holmes County, and actively promoted their side in the division, as can be seen in his commentary in *Begebenheiten von die Alte Amische Gemeinde von Holmes und Wayne County, Ohio und Adams County, Indiana von 1938 bis zu 1958*.<sup>17</sup> Joseph E. Peachey was a deacon in the Upper Middle district of the Peachy (Renno) Old Order Amish group in the Big Valley settlement, where all three types of Amish practice “strict shunning.”<sup>18</sup>

The typed Byler edition is reprinted from the same booklet that Raber’s Book Store claims as its source, which was printed by Gordonville Print Shop in 1968. Byler publishes the handwritten “original copy” of the *Beschluß*—a claim that I find no reason to doubt—immediately following the *Beschluß* in typed form.<sup>19</sup> Based on an examination of his transcription, he seems to be the most accurate of the transcribers. He is also the only one of the three who doesn’t include the paragraph quoted above, as the “original copy” itself doesn’t include the paragraph. This raises special doubts about the trustworthiness of the edition published

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*meinde von Holmes und Wayne County, Ohio und Adams County, Indiana von 1938 bis zu 1958* (Gordonville, PA: Gordonville Print Shop, 1968).

<sup>17</sup>The English translation of this document is Gregory Sheets, Dan Raber, and Cory Anderson, trans., “An Account of the Schisms between the Stutzman-Troyer & Tobe Churches and the Old Order & Andy Weaver Churches: An English Translation of John Y. Schlabach’s *Begebenheiten von die Alte Amische Gemeinde von Holmes und Wayne County, Ohio und Adams County, Indiana von 1938 bis zu 1958* [Occurrences in the Old Amish Brotherhoods from Holmes and Wayne County, Ohio, and Adams County, Indiana, from 1938 to 1958]” *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 7, no.2 2019: 115-124. The compilation of this document is clearly laid out in the section titled “Vorrede Und Grüß” (Forward and Greetings): “These occurrences, for the most part, could not be taken from letters, or other documents; rather, they were assembled by listening to bishops, ministers, and brethren, and under their supervision put together by John Y. Schlabach. Brought together at the request and with the help of bishops, ministers, and brothers, and set to pen and paper by John Y. Schlabach Millersburg, Ohio” (116).

<sup>18</sup> Kauffman, *Mifflin County Amish and Mennonite Story*, 305, 372.

<sup>19</sup> Schlabach, *Begebenheiten*, 27-28.

by Raber’s Book Store, and by extension, the Keim edition as well.

There is a tradition among the Amish of LaGrange County (IN) that bishop Henry N. Miller of Middlebury (IN) left the meeting early, and he signed a *Beschluß* that was shorter than the version that was later published, presumably lacking the additional paragraph that is printed in the Raber and Keim editions. This account is at least partially corroborated by the conference notes that Schlabach published alongside the original *Beschluß*: “Der Bischof Henry Miller von Middlebury, Ind. ist noch seller abend verlassen für auf seine heim reise gehn.”<sup>20</sup> Since Raber’s Book Store includes a paragraph that is not included in the John Y. Schlabach edition printed by Gordonville Print Shop—a Lancaster County (PA) print shop that represents the “strict shunning” position—it is almost certain that this paragraph was a later addition. In a possible hint at how the paragraph became included within the *Beschluß* articles themselves, this paragraph appears in a supposedly original copy of the *Beschluß* after the names of the seven men on the bishop committee in a booklet that claims to be a careful examination of the events (by people from the Tobe Amish) regarding the 1955 Diener *Beschluß*, titled *Eine Untersuchung in die Alt Amische Gemein von 1922 Bis zu 1974*,<sup>21</sup> suggesting that this paragraph slowly migrated into the text itself. Although a strong case could be made for the appropriateness of including this paragraph when recollecting the events connected with the 1955 Diener *Versammlung*, from a strictly textual standpoint, this paragraph was not part of the original document that the seven-man bishop committee signed. It would be more fitting to include it in apparatus alongside the text.

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<sup>20</sup> Schlabach, *Begebenheiten*, 21. In *Unser Leit*, Leroy Beachy notes that there is a tradition in Holmes County which claims that the Andy Weaver ministers were dissatisfied with the ruling and gathered behind the barn to draft their own *Beschluß* (vol. 2, footnote 130, p. 441).

<sup>21</sup> Middlebury, IN: Middlebury Graphic Arts, 1978. For the English translation, see Gregory Sheets and Cory Anderson, “An Old Order (Tobe) Account of the Schisms of Sam Yoder, Abe Troyer-Jake Stutzman, Tobe Hostetler, Joe L. Schwartz, and Seymour, Missouri: An English Translation of *Eine Untersuchung in die Alt Amische Gemein von 1922 Bis zu 1974* [An Examination in the Old Amish Brotherhood from 1922 to 1974]” *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 7(2): 158.

## INTERPRETATION

Interpretation of the 1955 Diener Beschluß is neither simple nor straightforward because the task requires familiarity with the flow of Old Order Amish history in North America until the middle of the twentieth century and detailed knowledge of how the participants themselves interpreted the ministerial decision. Since the participants are no longer living, the events must be reconstructed on the basis of documentary evidence and tradition that has been passed down by word-of-mouth.

The first article of the 1955 Diener Beschluß states that what was decided by the invited ministers, with the voice of the church and agreement of the Holmes County ministers, should be held to. This is a reference to the Beschluß drafted by David J. Fisher of Christiana (PA), Jacob J. Miller of Middlefield (OH), and William L. Bontrager of Shipshewana (IN) on August 19, 1953 and printed in *Begebenheiten Von Die Alte Amishe Gemeinde Von Holmes Und Wayne Co. Ohio Und Adams Co., Ind.*:

1. Ist es angesehen worden das die glieder wo vorher in die gemein gefodert worden sollen geschafft werden.

2. Ist es angesehen das die glieder wo ein neben gemeinde sterten haben wollen sollen ein fehler bekennen welches sie auch gethan haben in der gemein, Aug. 19, 1953 ans Andy Millers, und verner in die gemein kommen und ihre beruf wahr nehem so wie sie es angenommen haben auf ihre gebogene knie.

3. Ist es angesehen worden das der Bischof Andy J. Weaver, Bischof Abe D. Troyer, und der Bischof Gideon E. Troyer sollen dem Bischof David S. Troyer in der Orrville gemein fort helfen wann er hülff brauch.<sup>22</sup>

1. It is decided that the members who were previously requested to confess a failure shall be further disciplined.

2. It is decided that members who wanted to start another district should acknowledge [their] mistake—which they did at church services [on]

August 19, 1953 at Andy Miller's—continue coming to church, and be true to their baptismal promises as they vowed on their bent knees.

3. It is decided that Bishop Andy J. Weaver, Bishop Abe D. Troyer, and Bishop Gideon E. Troyer should help Bishop David S. Troyer in the Orville brotherhood when he needs help.<sup>23</sup>

These articles address a situation in the Orrville (Old Order Amish) church district in Wayne County in which bishop David S. Troyer found his church members exasperating to deal with. The issues started back in 1942 when certain Old Order Amish members refused to shun Amish persons that had been excommunicated from the Abe Troyer group, namely Deacon Emmanuel Hershberger and a lay member.<sup>24</sup> After Deacon Emmanuel Hershberger was joined by minister Tobe Hostetler from the Jacob Stutzman district (who had been silenced, and whose silencing was not supported by Hershberger), a large Holmes-Wayne County ministers' meeting was held, and the people who were meeting with Tobe Hostetler and Emmanuel Hershberger for church were asked to return to the Abe Troyer district to make their things right. Then they would be allowed to move where they wished without being in the bann. But this did not happen, and there were different opinions whether the Abe Troyer bann should be recognized. As a result, a bishop committee, consisting of Jacob P. Miller from Topeka (IN), John L. Schwartz of Nappanee (IN), and John Hostetler from Dover (DE), was called by the Menno Mast district (in Wayne County) because some members were also not willing to recognize the Abe Troyer bann. The bishop committee ruled that the bann should be upheld. However, the church still did not achieve a unanimous vote to keep the bann. The same ruling was given in the Andy Weaver

<sup>23</sup> Sheets, Raber, and Anderson, "An Account of the Schisms." 120.

<sup>24</sup> Schlabach, *Begebenheiten*, 4-5. It is important to keep in mind that the Abe Troyer district was a small faction that emerged from the Swartzentruber Amish. Since the main body of Old Order Amish did not fellowship with the Swartzentruber Amish, or the Troyer splinter group, they didn't necessarily consider it obligatory to recognize their bann. The difference in ecclesiastical function probably had more to do with the extent that a church leader was sympathetic to the traditionalist lifestyle of the Troyer group.

<sup>22</sup> Schlabach, *Begebenheiten*, 12.

district in Holmes County in 1946 by Bishop Eli Bontrager from Shipshewana (IN), Bishop Neil Hershberger of Burton (OH), and Bishop John Renno from Belleville (PA).<sup>25</sup>

These same questions led to disunity in David S. Troyer's Orrville congregation, and a ministerial meeting was held on August 18-19, 1953, to try to resolve the matter. It is not clear what happened to the other ministers of the Orrville congregation but, in the end, it seems that a significant portion of the congregation continued gathering for church services as before but without any ministers present.<sup>26</sup> After many formal requests for assistance from other Holmes-Wayne County ministers, the members who were not willing to uphold the Abe Troyer bann found ordained men in other Holmes-Wayne County Old Order Amish districts who were willing to help with preaching services. This caused hard feelings between the church leaders that moved out of the Orrville district and the ministers that were helping the leaderless congregation.

The August 1953 Holmes County Beschluss states that Orrville members who were requested to make a confession in church but had not done so should be further disciplined. The second article states that members who had wanted to start another church should make a confession of error in the church which they had done, and that from then on should continue in the church and properly fill their calling, as they confessed on bended knee (when they were baptized). If Bishop David S. Troyer needed help in the future, then Bishops Andy J. Weaver, Abe D. Troyer, and Gideon E. Troyer should provide help in the Orrville district.<sup>27</sup> By 1955, it was clear that the decision of the committee in 1953 did not resolve the impasse. Restating the 1953 decision two years later, but without specifying what type of discipline

should be applied to which participants under what circumstances, likely indicates that there was a lack of agreement among the church leaders who gathered for the nationwide ministers' meeting in Holmes County in 1955. This seems to be verified by the fact that a number of the Holmes County ministers did not show up on the third day of the meeting.<sup>28</sup>

The second article of the 1955 Diener Beschluss states that the ministers were called to work on the basis of what was decided in 1917, which they believed was grounded on the teachings of Christ and the apostles. There were actually four Diener Beschlüsse written in 1917. The first one deals with the Sam Yoder (later Swartzentruber Amish) situation and is dated March 2;<sup>29</sup> the second one deals more broadly with the practices of the Holmes County Old Order Amish churches and is dated March 9; the third one, regarding the lawsuit brought by Eli J. Gingerich against the ministers and bishops of Holmes County for putting him in the bann, is dated October 14; and the fourth Beschluss is a nationwide ministers' meeting held October 24-26 that reaffirmed the March 9<sup>th</sup> decision alongside the 1865 Beschluss. Presumably the 1955 Diener Beschluss is referring to the fourth 1917 Beschluss,<sup>30</sup> which adds nothing to the March 9<sup>th</sup> Beschluss except that it also affirms the 1865 Beschluss.<sup>31</sup> That the March 9<sup>th</sup> Beschluss was in

<sup>25</sup> Schlabach, *Begebenheiten*, 6-8. Cf. Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, *An Amish Paradox* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 45-47.

<sup>26</sup> The Andy Weaver understanding is that these church members were *ungehorsam* (disobedient). The Old Order-mainstream think that proper church function was transgressed since disciplinary measures were taken without the unified voice of the congregation. The unified voice of the congregation is what sets the Old Orders apart from the democratic or ministerial rule of other denominations, according to many Old Orders.

<sup>27</sup> Schlabach, *Begebenheiten*, 10-12.

<sup>28</sup> "Und sin dann zu einem beschluss kommen, und noch ein gebet gefuhrt aber es warden nicht so fiele dort, Donnerstags als die zwei tage zuvor und warden etliche von den Holmes Co. Bischofen garnicht bei kommen wie auch andre diener, dann war es mittag zeit." Byler, *Alte Schreibens*, 77. It is not clear which faction these absent church leaders represented, but it seems they likely sided with the Andy Weavers.

<sup>29</sup> For letter pertaining to the Sam Yoder division, consult Edward Kline, "Research Notes: Letters Pertaining to the Sam Yoder Division" *Heritage Review* vol. 16: Jan 2007: 11-13. For more detail regarding the division of the Sam Yoder church, which led to the emergence of the Wengerd group (which later reunited with the mainstream Old Order Amish, and from which Andy Weaver drew many new members), see Roy M. Weaver, "Glimpses of the Amish Church in Holmes County, Ohio, 1917-1922, and Report of a Ministers' Meeting in 1922" *Heritage Review* vol. 16: Jan 2007: 9-11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ein Ordnungsbrief der beschlossen worden ist in Holmes County, Ohio, den 26ten Oktober, 1917* (Baltic, OH: Raber's Book Store, no date).

<sup>31</sup> *Artikel und Ordnungen der Christlichen Gemeinde in Christo Jesu* (Baltic, OH: Raber's Book Store), 13-16.



view in 1955 is verified by the fact that it was cited when the 1955 Beschluß was cited.<sup>32</sup>

The March 9, 1917 Diener Beschluß consists of 13 articles relating to the conduct of ministers; slandering and false accusations; the way that parents raise their children; negligence in attending church services; an unacceptable increase in material items among church members; transferring membership from one congregation to another; the use of alcohol and going into saloons; the ownership and use of telephones; the proper use of the bann; and what is considered disorderly conduct. Notable about this document is the fact that the “extra” paragraph that appears in two of the three sources of the 1955 Diener Beschluß cited above is an exact quote of the eleventh article of the 1917 Diener Beschluß, in English translation: It is noted as proper to keep order in the church with the full counsel of the church and the Word of God according to the circumstances, if something happens that is considered by the ministry and the church as Bann-worthy, then shall the Bann and shunning be observed by both ministry and members until a scriptural repentance and restoration has been shown.<sup>33</sup>

This fact is noted on page 51 of *Eine Untersuchung in Die Alt Amische Gemein Von 1922 bis zu 1974*, where it is printed after the three articles of the 1955 Diener Beschluß titled “Original Copy Fon 1955 Diener Beschluß” with the paragraph heading “Elfte paragraph fon dem 1917 diener beschluss.” Since the 1955 Diener Beschluß itself reaffirms the 1917 Beschluß, this is probably why Andy Weaver ministers do not consider the longer form of the 1955 Diener Beschluß troubling. They are simply indicating which portion of the March 9, 1917 Beschluß that the 1955 Beschluß is citing.

The first clause of the first sentence of the additional paragraph is uncontroversial, as it bases the use of the bann (excommunication) on the counsel of the church with the Word of God according to the circumstances. The second clause also seems

uncontroversial as it states that shunning should be applied to persons who are considered worthy of the bann by the ministers and members, and that the shunning continues uninterrupted until “evangelical repentance” and an “evangelical betterment of life” is shown or proven. But the third clause is controversial since there were different opinions of what constitutes “evangelical repentance,” and how this betterment of life must be proven, as shown by the note that “etliche andere Meinungen vorkommen, es könnte sein wie im 2 Tim. 2,20 geschrieben steht” (a number of other opinions were expressed) at the assembly in 1955. For the Andy Weaver Amish, the second sentence of the additional paragraph indicates where the first sentence is heading; the point being that all Amish churches should respect the ecclesiastical discipline of all other Amish churches. No exception to this rule is possible. The Andy Weavers have adopted this position because they note that any other position could make ecclesiastical discipline binding only to the extent that other churches agree with the discipline, which could lead to a lot of unnecessary discussions and disputes, and ecclesiastical ruptures.<sup>34</sup>

*Eine Untersuchung in Die Alt Amische Gemein Von 1922 bis zu 1974* includes a clarification issued by Henry N. Miller—the sole bishop from the 1955 committee that went home early due to illness, and about whom there is a tradition among the Amish in northern Indiana that he signed a shorter version of the Beschluß than is commonly published—and includes signatures from four other Old Order Amish bishops that were not on the committee, but three of which appear in the list of ministers that attended the churchwide ministers’ meeting. This letter, titled “Eine Erklärung Oder Überlegung Fon Dem 1955 Diener Beschluß Fon Eins Fon Die Committee Bishofen,” notes that differing views were voiced at the meeting regarding the use of the bann—primarily the question whether a church that had not put the bann in place could later lift it—and shares his understanding of how the bann was practiced in the Old Order Amish churches from the time the 1917 Beschluß was written until the 1955 meeting. Miller emphasizes that church discipline can only be binding if it is with the agreement of the congregation. In

<sup>32</sup> Byler and Byler, *Diener Beschlusen*, 11-13.

<sup>33</sup> Dan Raber, Gregory Sheets, and Cory Anderson, “Ordnungs Briefen of 1865, 1917, and 1939: English Translations of Important Old Amish Church Orders.” *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 7(2):111.

<sup>34</sup> This raises the question: To what extent Amish ecclesiology reflects a conference-type church structure?

the third paragraph of the letter, he points out that he supports excommunication and shunning, and that the lifting of the bann requires the matters to be made right. In the fourth paragraph, Henry notes that this is where many different opinions arise. Some people believe that a banned member can only make things right in the church where he came from while others think that it was not decided that way in 1917. Since the ministers had different views of what the 1917 Beschluß meant, and since the 1955 Beschluß does not clarify the matter, the ministers do not appear to have been of one mind in what they were agreeing to.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of historiography, the October 24-26, 1917 churchwide ministers' meeting is based on the March 9, 1917 Holmes County ministers' meeting. All of the Holmes County ministers (even including Sam Yoder, the Old Order Amish bishop who started the Swartzentruber Amish faction) signed the committee decision on May 13, 1913, to allow a member to go over to a more liberal but non-resistant congregation without being excommunicated and shunned. It also permits other congregations to lift the bann in an evangelical manner if that former Old Order Amish member had now amended his life.<sup>36</sup> Since the 1917 decision does not revise that logic in any explicit way, then it seems that this standard should be presumed to flow from May 13, 1913 to March 9, 1917 to October 24-26, 1917 and on to the 1955 Diener Beschluß. But this is where the difficulty arises, as noted by Henry N. Miller, because some of the church leaders who attended the 1955 meeting probably did not understand the local history that underpinned the 1917 Diener Beschluß, and thus confusion arose regarding what they were agreeing to in 1955,<sup>37</sup> especially considering that there were three ministerial decisions encouraging the Abe Troyer bann to be upheld—in 1941, 1946, and 1953.<sup>38</sup> The key here, highlighted by

Middlebury Bishop Henry N. Miller, is that those three ministerial decisions can only be binding if agreed to by the congregation where the recommendations were given. The original bann is only binding if that bann was put in place on the basis of a unanimous church vote. Since the Tobe Hostetler people claim that Abe Troyer did not have a unanimous vote, Miller was apparently not inclined to recognize the bann. He was far from alone in this position, as is clear from later history.

A key portion of the 1917 Beschluß is the introduction where it notes that they will not repeat what was covered by the old Ordnungsbrief. Leroy Beachy assumes that this is a reference to the 1913 Diener Beschluß. This may be true. But it is more likely a reference to the 1865 Diener Beschluß, a document written by the ministers that formed the Old Order Amish churches in the midst of the Great Schism, because the 1913 Beschluß is not printed in Keim's booklet, and the preceding text is the 1865 Beschluß. And, in the edition published by Raber's Book Store, the 1865 Beschluß is published immediately before the

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his opinion about the committee decision of May 1913, he had never heard of it (Private correspondence dated May 1, 2022). This is evidence of my belief that Andy Weavers link the 1809 Pennsylvania ministerial ruling with their reading of the 1917 Beschluß (minus the 1913 committee decision that it is actually built on), the 1955 Beschluß, and onwards. The Old Order-mainstream, on the other hand, tend to ignore the 1809 decision and instead note the 1913 Holmes County committee decision, the 1917 Beschluß, and interpret the 1955 Beschluß in light of the 1913 committee decision rather than the 1809 Pennsylvania ministerial ruling. This shows that an appeal to confessional statements alone cannot prove one position as the historically exclusive faith and practice of the Amish through the centuries because the confessions do not all speak with an identical voice and meaning. The 1809 ruling that any person who leaves the Amish church will be excommunicated and shunned for the simple reason of *leaving the Amish church* (without regard to any other considerations) undergirds the other controversial Pennsylvania (minus Lancaster-area Amish agreement) decision that a Mennonite man who wishes to join the Amish church must be rebaptized, and is quite different from the tenor and meaning of the 1865 Old Order statement regarding their understanding of the Christian faith. Holmes County clearly rejected this conclusion when they received him as a member in their congregation without rebaptism. This led to significant ecclesiastical conflict between Holmes County and most Pennsylvania Amish communities. See Paton Yoder, "A Controversy Among the Amish Regarding the Rebaptism of Mennonites, 1820-1845: A Newly-Discovered Document." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 73 (1999): 87-106.

<sup>35</sup> Middlebury, 1978, 53-54. Sheets and Anderson, "An Old Order (Tobe) Account," 161-162.

<sup>36</sup> Roy Weaver ("The Amish Community in the Holmes County, Ohio Area (1910-1914)" *Heritage Review* 7 [1998]: 13-14) provides a transcription of the 1913 committee decision but dates it May 21<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Leroy Beachy, *Unser Leit*, vol. 2, 399.

<sup>38</sup> This reading seems particularly likely as I corresponded with a prominent Andy Weaver bishop from New York who personally knew Joseph E. Peachey and John Y. Schlabach and considered them well-liked friends. When I asked him

decisions made in 1917, that is, as a single, unified document.<sup>39</sup> If this is properly indicative, and Beachy is mistaken that the church leaders had in mind the 1913 Diener Beschluß, the result is not much different because the 1865 Beschluß bases their faith and baptismal promise on the Word of the Lord and Articles of Faith (Dordrecht) and a life that conforms to these standards, not on a specific ecclesiastical structure. That is, discipline is meted out according to actions—which are themselves interpreted according to circumstances—rather than specific organizational lines. The interpretation that the Andy Weaver (and some Old Order-mainstream) churches advocate—that the bann automatically applies to anyone who leaves the Old Order Amish churches—is something of an innovation in terms of the historical movement from 1865 to 1917 to 1955.

The third article in the 1955 Diener Beschluß states that all who follow these rules, which are grounded on God’s Word, should work together in peace, with hand and kiss, and to hold communion together. That means that congregations that do not keep the standards laid out in this document stand outside the fellowship.

### RECEPTION HISTORY

The reception history of the 1955 Beschluß is somewhat complex.<sup>40</sup> The most important fact to note is that almost no one from the side that disavows “strict shunning” cites this Beschluß. This fact itself is indicative of what was meant by at least some ministers that were present when the 1955 Beschluß was signed. However, it is also possible that the popular impression that the 1955 Beschluß supports the Andy Weaver reading is more the result of frequent citation by those from the Andy Weaver (strict shunning) side. That the three (Keim, Raber, and Byler) editions cited above are transcribed by persons from the Andy Weaver group supports this impression.

<sup>39</sup> Raber’s Book Store.

<sup>40</sup> For an interesting example of a much more complex reception history, and the value of reception history of religious documents that were modified for polemical purposes, consult Carla Vieira, “The Puzzling Path of a Recondite Text: The Composition, Circulation, and Reception of the *Noticias Recônditas* in Eighteenth-Century England.” *Church History* 88 (2019): 345-80.

The Lancaster County (PA) Amish provide contradictory hints at the meaning of the document. They regularly side with the “strict shunning” position. However, they also fellowship with churches that do not keep this practice or this reading of the text.

The 1955 Beschluß was cited at a nationwide ministers’ meeting in Geauga County (OH) in 1972; again in Linesville (PA) in 1989; then in Clyde (NY) in 2001; and again in New Wilmington (PA) in 2006. The New Wilmington Beschluß itself notes the following line of agreement: “Mir sind einig und berufen uns auf der 1917 Beschluß, der 1955 Beschluß, und der 1972 Beschluß, der Linesville Beschluß, und und der Clyde Beschluß”<sup>41</sup> [*sic.*]. But the bishops that agreed to the 2006 New Wilmington Beschluß are a much narrower set of bishops than at Geauga County in 1972, and the Geauga Beschluß was made without any ministers being present from northern Indiana (the LaGrange and Nappanee) or Arthur (IL) settlements. Since 1972, it seems that the Old Order Amish from Somerset (PA) have been excluded from this circle. Later, the Lancaster question came up because of their acceptance of computers and other related technologies. They have been excluded by Bishop Joe Keim and those that fellowship with his settlement in Fultonville (NY). Therefore, it is somewhat difficult to interpret the 1955 Beschluß simply on the basis of the reception history of this text as there are contrasting narratives and a slow exclusion of churches that do not clearly support the Andy Weaver reading of this text, or that permitted a level of technology that is discomfiting to some Andy Weavers.

In the Raber and Byler editions, the 1955 Beschluß is accompanied by notes about the meeting. In the Raber edition at least three significant topics are raised—how the Old Order Amish should relate to traveling evangelists, what they should think about the doctrine of the assurance of salvation, and how important Christian concepts should be understood (including spiritual freedom, pride and humility, peace with God, orderliness, Christian duty/calling and faithfulness to that calling, repentance and improvement of life, etc.). These are nearly always set in a highly traditionalist Old Order frame of reference.

<sup>41</sup> Byler and Byler, *Diener Beschluß*, 24.



The Byler edition was written by a minister who received the signature of two bishops (an unnamed bishop from Belleville and Bishop Emanuel K. Beachy from Belleville) and Deacon Andy S. Miller from Burton, OH. This document provides a different angle of the gathering, with considerable notes about each day; fewer topics are raised than in the Raber edition but still a mention of “assurance of salvation” with a negative interpretation of the concept. The Byler edition understands their goal as being shaped “nach des Herren wort und Christlicher ordnung” (according to the Lord’s word and Christian order). Very little insight is given on the significant differences that marked the conference. The anonymous author, who wrote this account “in meiner schwachheit” (in my weakness), merely repeats the observation that there were various opinions and that the third day of the conference was poorly attended. No mention of the 1917 Beschluß (or any other meeting) is mentioned, and no interpretation of previous ministerial decisions is suggested.

The most important point to note about the three articles of the 1955 Diener Beschluß is that they only reaffirm the local Holmes County ministerial decision of 1953 regarding the situation in the Orrville congregation without spelling out how a person who left the Amish church should be disciplined or what should be done with members of the Orrville district who seemed troublesome to the resident bishop; reaffirms the 1917 church-wide Diener Beschluß without clarifying how the eleventh article should be put into practice; and encourages all congregations who affirm the unclear positions taken above to greet one another with the holy kiss and hold communion together. The diversity of opinions expressed at the church-wide ministers’ meeting (noted above) is testified to by the turn of events that split the Adams County (IN) settlement when Joe L. Schwartz reversed the decision to allow a member banned by the Stutzman-Troyers to be taken out of the bann in his home congregation, when his father was the bishop. This move split the Adams County settlement into two sides.

Even though there are different opinions regarding what the 1955 Beschluß means, the Beschluß has been held in high regard by the (strict shunning) Andy Weaver Amish and has become an explicit identity marker. For example, when inviting leaders to a churchwide ministers’ meeting in

Atlantic (PA) in the early 2000s, the gathering was only “fir die das sich an der 1955 diener Beschluß halta” (for those that keep the 1955 ministers’ agreement),<sup>42</sup> more specifically those who adopt the Andy Weaver reading of this event. Interesting in this case is that both sides of the division continue to lay claim to the Old Order Amish identity. When asked to self-identify, both groups identify themselves as “Amish” or “Old Order Amish,” and if pressed, are hesitant to go beyond referring to “unser Leit” (our people). They are not inclined toward special labels or titles, even though there are significant differences in faith and practice.<sup>43</sup>

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

When the Old Order Amish ministers gathered at Daniel P. Schrock’s on the first day of the Diener Versammlung in 1955, there were at least two different opinions about the most pressing ecclesiastical question: Should the main body of Old Order Amish churches consider it obligatory to recognize the disciplinary action of Amish churches that broke fellowship with them? From the perspective of three consecutive bishop committees (in 1941, 1946, and 1953), the answer was a firm “yes.” However, there were quite a few who did not agree with this conclusion. From the perspective of whether the excommunicated persons (in this particular case, Deacon Emmanuel Hershberger and lay member Jacob Shetler)<sup>44</sup> were justly put in the bann, it is difficult to see how the Old Order Amish could agree with Abe Troyer’s disciplinary action (of banning a member for voting against putting away material items that were already in use among the members), espe-

<sup>42</sup> Letter from Dan M. Yoder and Owen W. Detweiler in Byler and Byler, *Diener Beschlusen*, 64.

<sup>43</sup> For a fascinating study of the various ways that “orthodoxy” is an ongoing project rather than a fixed and settled religious matter, see Sorcha A. Brophy, “Orthodoxy as Project: Temporality and Action in an American Protestant Denomination.” *Sociology of Religion* 77 (2016): 123-43.

<sup>44</sup> This is the Jacob Shetler who moved to Adams County (IN) and was taken up from the bann by resident Bishop Joe A. Schwartz. However, after Joe A. died, his son Joe L. Schwartz reversed course, dividing the Adams County community into two factions known as the “Joe L” and “Shetler” groups that do not fellowship with each other down to the present day.



cially since it appears to have been done without the unanimous consent of the congregation.

An important subject that Bishop Henry N. Miller and the four additional bishops raised in their statement of clarification in 1972<sup>45</sup> is whether the decision of a ministerial committee should be considered binding without the unanimous agreement of the church that they are ministering to. Rather than being a ruling committee that a congregation is expected to submit to, these bishops see outside ministerial counsel (*fremde man*) as a committee of respected men who lead the congregation toward unified, scriptural practice in an advisory capacity. In short, their decisions are not binding unless agreed to by the congregation they are assisting. They are given spiritual authority to counsel and lead but not by fiat. This means that the ministerial decisions of 1941, 1946, and 1953 are not formally binding and should not be treated as such.

Another disputed topic is whether a congregation may resolve disciplinary action taken by another congregation. In the statement of clarification noted above, these bishops state that when a member goes to another brotherhood and upholds their ordinances and lives peacefully there and is taken out of the bann, then the shunning can be lifted. Since this is how they relate to members that leave their churches, presumably this is also how they intend to relate to members that come to them from other congregations with whom they are not in fellowship. The Andy Weaver Amish oppose this practice, insisting that a congregation's disciplinary action can only be resolved where it was instituted. As a result, they recognize an Abe Troyer bann, even if they do not agree with the reasons for, or the method by which, such disciplinary action was performed.

A further topic that is addressed in a footnote of the clarification issued by Henry N. Miller and four additional bishops is the subject of lifting the shunning on a member who goes to a (presumably non-Amish) congregation that practices "clearly written ordinances" such as non-resistance, the woman's head covering, footwashing, etc. The Andy Weaver Amish argue that this was the crux of the matter, what the 1955 Diener Beschluß is primarily about. In any case, the letter of clari-

fication points out that although they should not have much to do with a member who leaves their congregation (presumably for a "higher church"), shunning is lifted when the ex-member upholds the "clearly written ordinances" in their new congregational home, lives peacefully as an upbuilding member, and is taken out of the ban there. Miller and the four additional bishops note that this was the practice in Holmes County from 1917 to 1955. If this is the case, as I argued in the previous section based on documentary history, then the Andy Weaver position is something of an innovation. However, when placed within the longer horizon, that is not entirely the case since an earlier Diener Beschluß issued by ministers from three Amish settlements in Pennsylvania in 1809 states that "all those who leave us and unite with other churches are to be regarded as apostate persons, and shall, according to the Lord's Word and ordinance, be excommunicated, and are to be regarded as subject to the ban."<sup>46</sup> But again, this position did not go unchallenged as the 1809 Pennsylvania decision was questioned in Holmes County, Ohio, in 1826.<sup>47</sup>

The meaning of the 1955 Diener Beschluß, already disputed the day that the statement was written, has shifted with time as the Andy Weaver Amish have defined themselves as not allowing an ex-member to have the bann lifted if they go to a higher (non-Amish) church. This was the position that was held by the Old Orders in Somerset County (PA) when they split with Bishop Moses M. Beachy, after whom the Beachy Amish-Mennonites are named, when he refused to implement the 1809 Beschluß regarding ex-members that went to nearby Amish-Mennonite congregations. But it has also taken on new shape as Andy Weavers regularly criticize the position of Old Order-mainstream congregations for allowing shunning to be lifted without amendment of life. The issue in nearly all of these cases is not that a member committed a punishable offense and afterward fled his congregation. Nor is it a matter

<sup>46</sup> Leroy Beachy, *Unser Leit*, vol.2, 328.

<sup>47</sup> Yoder, *Tradition and Transition*, 30. Elmer Yoder ("History of the Valley View Amish-Mennonite Church." *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 25, 2 [1964]: 6-7) claims that the Mifflin County settlement did not practice shunning until 1910, when the leader of the Peachey church (Bishop David C. Peachey) followed the example of the church leaders in Lancaster County and adopted "strict shunning."

<sup>45</sup> *Eine Untersuchung in Die Alt Amische Gemein Von 1922 bis zu 1974, 1978.*

that the new congregation commits sins that are clearly stated in the Bible. Instead, the matter is whether or not an Amish congregation feels that it can allow ex-members to move to a “higher church” without the risk of losing more members to those churches. In short, it is a defensive move to preserve the social and numerical strength of their fellowship of churches.

The dispute that split the Old Order Amish in the middle of the twentieth century started with the question whether an Amish church must recognize the disciplinary action of an Amish church that it is not in fellowship with but eventually involved numerous questions related to ecclesiastical polity.

### CONCLUSION

When all factors are given due consideration and weight, it is clear that the Amish have held a diversity of opinions on ecclesiastical polity throughout their North American sojourn. Diversity is not a new development in the twenty-first century but the way that it pushed to the forefront and broke long-held ties of fellowship as congregations lined up to take sides in the matter, is new. Quite a few congregations have tried to hold a mediating position between the Andy Weaver and Old Order-mainstream affiliations. However, the Andy Weavers have practiced second-degree separation, whereby they do not fellowship with churches that do not shun ex-members that go to a higher non-Amish congregation and do not fellowship with congregations that fellowship with congregations that do not follow their practice in this regard. Until the publication of Leroy Beachy’s *Unser Leit*, studies of the Amish have tended to frame the history of twentieth century Amish experience in the light of schooling issues, the two World Wars, the introduction of the Social Security program, and the New Order Amish division in 1966.<sup>48</sup> But the division in 1955 was much more consequential as an entirely new matrix of Amish ecclesiastical life

in North America formed, with all but a few factions that had split off years earlier forced to take one of two sides. It is, therefore, not clear why the New Order division has received more attention in popular-level literature on the Amish except that it was more interesting to the target audience, mostly Evangelical Protestants, who wonder what the Amish think about the new birth, evangelism, and related topics more than the ecclesiastical workings of Amish churches.<sup>49</sup>

When the two sides that emerged in the wake of the 1955 Beschluß are referred to, they are nearly always identified as those that practice strict shunning and those that don’t. However, this terminology is misleading because the Andy Weaver are not strict about how they shun but are strict when they choose who is worthy of excommunication. The Andy Weavers’ position is that anyone who leaves the Amish church must be excommunicated (and therefore shunned), and can only have the shunning lifted by having the excommunication lifted, which, in their handling of the practice of excommunication, means returning to the Amish church that excommunicated them and staying within the range of churches from which their local church does not excommunicate a member for moving.

It might be wise to find a better label for the Andy Weaver Amish because it lacks descriptiveness that could help outsiders who are new to the Amish. However, it is not clear what that label might be. “Old Order-strict excommunication” is not the simplest label to adopt. As a result, the Andy Weaver label will probably remain into the foreseeable future. But in any case, the field of Amish studies definitely should pay more attention to the 1955 Beschluß as it is critical to properly understanding the complexity of the Amish in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and moving forward.

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