

Building on a Wise Foundation: Stewards in a Hostile World

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I'm thankful for the robin's song. On March 10th a robin appeared in our kitchen window at the feeder. I told my wife that one robin does not make a spring but it sure helps to survive after the coldest February on record in Ohio. It was also the anniversary of my father's death about 22 years before.

My father was an agrarian. I was born into an agrarian family. Sometimes it doesn't seem fair because I was born into an agrarian family. My grandfather was a farmer, my great grandfather was a farmer, probably many generations back into Switzerland. We lived in a community of small scale farmers in small towns. Outside of the years that I spent in Cleveland in the 1960s I have lived nowhere else. I often say I sleep in the room where I was born. I'm really, really non-migratory. I have been steeped and sautéed in this way of life.

I must confess it took me a while to become a believer in this way of life; it simply did. I think many young people...we ask a lot of questions. I asked my father a lot of questions and I think that happens over and over. We ask the old farmers questions, those startled old farmers... and just as we heard this forenoon how the different ways of thinking came in, the Protestant thought, and those people were very, very gifted in presenting their views and the startled old farmers stumble. They could much more easily articulate their religion with their work than they could with their words and that's where a lot of the problems came in, and it took me a while to become a believer in this way of life.

I read too much; as Solomon writes, there is no end to books. I have a friend who has a bookstore in Wooster and he's always saying that what they call hard copy, the printed books, are going to disappear. No, I don't think so. Can you imagine curling up by a wood stove with one of those electronic readers eating popcorn; it just doesn't work. Yes praise God for it, they're coming to their senses; the electronic books peaked in 2013 and it's going the other way.

I should just continue a little bit from this morning; I started with a Peter Drucker story, the economist at Stamford, I think, a Jewish Austrian immigrant who still gave his lectures at the age of 95 without notes. He was comparing in this lecture the Industrial Revolution with the Information Revolution, and, as I said, England never gave the status to the scientist and the technology that they gave to the agrarian, and today England has no schools of technology, no Caltechs, no MITs. They may have lost out on it, but here in the US the emphasis was all on the other hand and we have seen it.

Going back into this, building on a wise foundation, I feel inadequate to be talking on this. There are many people here that would be much more gifted than I am, in how to be stewards in a hostile world. So all I can do is, just sort of tell the story of what our community has been doing for over 200 years.

About 1960 a lot changed, as we know. It was already starting in 1845 when Edward Wisht went through Russia and preached a Protestant type of religion to the Russian Mennonites. That's where the Mennonite Brethren came out. At the end of his days he regretted what he did, but it was too late. It started over here, and sort of came to a head from about 1865 to 1879. Agriculture also began to change, and what is interesting to me is that the English farmers, they got the "flivver" in the 1910s or 1920s. They got a Model-T Ford, but they farmed with horses up until World War II, no exceptions. They knew horses, but yet they drove a car.

Our daughter-in-law likes old things so she bought a box of books at a garage sale. In there was a 1948 Montgomery Ward Farm Catalog, in mint condition. I remember the Sears and Roebuck one, but I was born in 1945, so I was only three years old when this was printed. In there, there was a complete line of horse drawn equipment. Eveners, tongues, harnesses... a new set of harness for ninety-nine dollars. At that time, or the early 1900's the factory in Illinois was manufacturing 100,000 sets of work harnesses from fine leather.

The Amish weren't the first ones... let's say Anabaptists weren't the first ones to question technology. Abraham Lincoln in 1858 visited an agricultural exhibition in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where they demonstrated the steam engine to pull a plow. Abraham Lincoln said to his aide, "What will happen to our rural communities?" He saw it in 1858, our forefather saw it fifty years later, what will happen... They looked at Gemeinde. Gemeinschaft is the German word for community. Gemeinde, Gemeinschaft, community, it's all from one.

They began to question this: Is this good or is it not? About 1960, after World War II, things began to change. Of course, that's when the pesticides came in, like Cyclone B. They used it in the concentration camps to gas the people. In peace time these gases were converted to pesticides. "Cide" means to kill; pesticide, herbicide, insecticide.

A lot began to change about 1960. When you look at grass in Iowa, grasses and corn went to about equal until 1960. Corn and soy beans went up and grasses which included oats went down. Of course if you farm with horses you grow small grains because the horses eat oats, so you stay with small grains. But that began to be different. From the late 1950's to the 1970's the mechanical and chemical improvements were promoted by agribusiness, and the farm publications were the voices proclaiming its wonders. The era peaked during the 1980's when the cry was get big or get out. We Amish and Mennonites resisted this manic push for expansion in farm size and scale and the over use of agrochemicals.

What saved us was the decision made by the church soon after World War I to limit technology, primarily in five areas, and I covered this a little bit this morning.

Prohibiting the tractor for tillage work in the fields, and the automobile for transportation... I have often been asked, "Well isn't it inconsistent to ride in an automobile and not own one?" Well I said, "When you fly to California do you buy an airplane or do you buy a ticket?" Just makes sense, doesn't it? Nothing against the automobile; it's a dead piece of metal, with some plastic and spark plugs thrown in.

No electricity from the grid. No telephones in the home. No high school or college. I always say we Amish, we leave the starting gate with the same level of education: eight years, and then you're out. It never stops. A college professor once told me that the very poorest college in this nation has a library that's sufficient to give anybody the best education in the world. Ray Miller's paper here, "The Vendor," had an interesting quote in there. He said if we give a smart phone to a Masai tribesman in Africa that has never held any technology in his hand, he will have more information at his fingertips than the President of the United States had in the year 2000. Imagine, in 15 years that much. We can only use very little of it.

So, up until World War I the Amish had accepted and used farm technology as it was developed. They struggled with the windmill because pumping water on Sunday didn't seem to be appropriate. The manure spreader, the self-unloading manure spreader was a little bit of an issue, though not much.

We would question our dad but he never had a lot to say. He just lived... he was a thresher man. When he lay dying in 1993, the winter of '92, '93, I'd sit by his bed side. I'd bring out his diaries. He was 87 years old. We would read the diaries when he would thresh with his neighbors. We were right on the edge of a French Catholic community. He threshed for the Catholics. He threshed for the Methodists, the Lutherans, the Mennonites, and the Amish. I told dad, "You saw the best of American agriculture, when there was enough technology to lighten the load, but not enough to displace the neighbor." It really worked well.

By making the decision to stay with animal traction we were largely ignored by the land-grant colleges, which was fortunate. The sociologists predicted in 1930 that we would be assimilated into American society by 1950. And really the Amish have a higher retention rate now than they did in 1900. Don't ask me those questions. I don't know why. Let's praise God.

Here some things I told you before. Our Anabaptist forefathers were livestock farmers. We worked around animals. They provided fertility for our fields. They pulled our plows. We still work with animals. And I say cows keep you home.

Then we go here between 1948. Norman Rockwell painted a painting on an Indiana farm not too far from here that was titled "The County Agent." You have to excuse me for using a painting at an Anabaptist meeting, but it just tells so much.

It was painted for the 4H folks in the United States. It was displayed in almost every extension office from Ohio to Iowa. It's a nice painting; but it tells a story. Maybe we will take a look at it now. This I think is very much how we work to be stewards in a hostile world. How we live as Kingdom Christians. I know it's a cliché being in the world, but not of the world; it's a lot easier said than done.



Here, that is the extension agent. He's out measuring the calf. Many of us older farmers, we had a tape we could put around the calf to estimate its weight. It's obviously a 4H project. The little girl has the calf. It's a Guernsey calf. We used to milk Guernsey cows, very gentle cows, very nice for young people to take to the fair or the show. We of course never showed, but for the people that went to the fair.

There's the girl with her 4H folder. And here are what I call the Ohio Beauty hens. We had a breed developed by a lady in Ohio, simply Rhode Island reds, occasionally a white one would crop up and she would collect all those white hens so then she had a white breed of the Rhode Island reds called Ohio Beauties. They were brown egg layers.

The boy is holding a hen, that was his 4H project. Next is the third child holding a dress she made for a 4H project, and there is mom just beaming.

This is an Anabaptist group. I'm very reluctant to use the word proud. That is a bad word, but I think we need to look at the word proud as parents... as C.S. Lewis said of the seven deadly sins, number one is pride and that's exactly where it is, where it should be. He said it. Now these are his words not mine but I agree with them, the sin of pride is if I think I'm a better person than you are. That is the sin of pride. We as parents, we need to display some kind of acknowledgment when our children do well. We have to show them some way or other or they will lose self esteem.

This is grandpa, with the bib overalls like those I think you Tampico, Illinois people wear. I like to see them, it looks farmer. We had a neighbor, a Lutheran, that always wore the bib overalls and a long sleeved chambray shirt always buttoned at the top. He was Pennsylvania Dutch but he was Lutheran; wonderful neighbor. Just to show how much language means, when he died, four Pennsylvania Dutch speaking neighbors were his pall bearers. Of course all four were Amish, and my dad was one of them.

He [the grandpa] looks just a little questionable at this modern way of looking at things. There in the doorway I think is the father. There is a cat on his shoulder. He's also wearing the bib overalls. He's probably the father of the children. And of course there in the window is the old white Percheron horse getting on the picture.

Now what does that say to us? Of course the focus is on the extension agent. Nothing wrong with him, we used the extension agent all the time. But the focus is on science, with wisdom, experience, local knowledge pushed to the background, leaving the picture, and that's what happened to American agriculture. That's where, praise be to God, our forefathers decided to stay with local knowledge, local people. I always tell the young people don't look to celebrities for role models; look to people that would be buried in local cemeteries. Those are our mentors and role models.

There is the dog and the chicken. It's nice scene. I think we could look at that as the church. Let's look, science represents modern, dare I say, Protestantism. I'm not here to criticize any faith or any religion but with tradition, maybe the old Anabaptist way as we heard on salvation, maybe pushed back to the fringes a little bit; sort of a separation of Faith and Works. I think I heard *Gospel Versus Gospel* mentioned here, the first 50 pages of that are invaluable. There was a Bender who said in, I think, 1890, "We're saved by the blood of Christ, and obedience keeps us saved." I mulled over that for a long time. It comes afterward. Then we try to pay God back for what he did – that is legalism. How much do we have to pay back before God is satisfied? Then no church Ordnung makes sense.

The little boy holding the hen, he took over the farm... this is the after story. It didn't go well, he lost the farm, and he committed suicide. It's a sad story, it happened too often. Praise be to God that we never looked at farming as drudgery. My father would look at the farm as an opportunity, and he helped... I had a wonderful father. He helped many young farmers start their farms, without charging interest, to help them get started. I would like to get a copy of the original painting just to hang it in my room there, just to look at it and see. To me, it's also sadness to see how much changed.

By limiting technology, and again, I'm not saying this is the way to do it, I said this is the way that we're trying to do, that our forefathers did it. Sometimes we wonder, was it by accident or was it by design? A hundred years ago they could never see what agriculture is today, that it's mostly a tremendous amount of corn and beans.

It always bothered me when food is burnt. I just can't see burning food. I've often wondered... when I work the fields, I have so much time to think. The horses know where they're walking, you're meditating, your thoughts can be all over the world, one foot swinging, there singing and daydreaming... and I thought, "Oh, cars going down the road, they're run by fire!" The fuel fires the spark plugs. I mentioned this to Wendell Berry, and he said "Yes, the interstates are rivers of fire!" We're burning, we're burning things.

We have always felt that colleges are much too inadequate to teach farming, because good farming is too complex to learn from books. Each region, actually every farm, its soils, the lay of the lands, springs and water courses, forests, weeds, and wildlife is different, and they have to be learned up close.

Squanto said to plant corn when the oak leaves are the size of a squirrel's ear. Here in the central highlands of Ohio where the white oak is the predominant oak, I wait to plant corn until the oak leaves are the size of the squirrel's hind foot. You know how when the oak leaves get long, they look like a squirrel's hind foot? Of course, we plant organic corn which needs to be planted later, when the soil is warm. Our way of growing organic corn is as easy, I say, as eating cherry pie. It's just you have to wait on nature.

You wait to sow the oats until the service berry blooms. Our old Lutheran neighbor said he called it the "sarvice baum", service tree. In the Appalachians they called it "sarvice" berry, because they had the "sarvices" on Sunday, and that's when they brought the first blossoms into the "sarvices." It blooms around April 20th. Then the soil temperature is exactly right to sow oats. The same with the corn, you wait until the soil, and leaves the size of squirrel's ears... Why am I getting into this?... Then you plant your corn, you have it harrowed just right, everything is right. You plant it in the soil. There's an old saying "To plow is to pray." Isn't it? We plow, it's like praying.

You have faith in the seed. You have faith in God for the rain. And we used to have an old John Deere walk-behind drill that my father bought new in 1937. His dad was a John Deere dealer. In the Depression he bought a new grain drill. It was eleven row, and you walked behind it. And I wore out my knees doing it, but at the end of twelve acres and a long day, it wasn't hard... it wasn't far to get on your knees and say, "God, I've sowed. Now I give it over to you," and he never failed us.

And again, I know I say too much about the horse, but staying with a horse for field traction and travel has so many more benefits than the Amish elders ever anticipated. I have a friend Rob Schlabaugh who once said, "We always preach about sowing and we always envision wild oats. We sow wild oats, we reap wild oats, but we also sow good oats." He said, "Our ancestors sowed good seed, and we've been reaping for hundreds of years of that good seed."

As I said before, we have a farm, we have horses, and we grow oats and hay. I always say at the end of the year, or at the end of February, we pay our income taxes. Now, I always was so glad to pay income taxes. You know why? It showed we made a profit. We don't pay income taxes if we don't make money. It's plain and simple. At the end of February, our income comes from the capture of sunlight from the previous growing season. We use oats and hay for the horses. That's temporary sunlight, not aged fossil fuel. The grass eats the sun, the horse eats the grass, the horse pulls the plow – it just recycles back to the soil. It's like David Mellinger, the old Alsatian farmer, said, it's like the gears. You throw in the gear and the gears grab and they turn and you aren't quite sure how it works. As the horses left, those meadows became soybeans and corn.

Our farm has never been tractor farmed. When we certified to become organic in the year 2000, the certifier, which was from the organization from Ohio. We were walking over the farm. He had a soil probe to go down and probe; he never used it. He said, "I can feel it through my feet, the tilth and the texture and the looseness of the soil, and that it absorbs water." You know, that was a nice thing he told me, and I appreciated it. It wasn't me. It was from my father, what he taught me.

Of course, when we first started farming I was a lot smarter than my father was. We signed up with an expensive lab in western Ohio, who tested the Albrecht system. I think Albrecht was one of those Amish from Illinois, that then was at the University of Missouri and they developed what they call the

Albrecht System of Soil. Speaking about soil, we eat so much from our farm. We have our own meat, our own eggs, and milk, vegetables, potatoes, everything. I said the minerals of my body would probably almost exactly match the minerals of our soil. If we want to have a healthy body we need to have a healthy soil.

A word on horses for transportation. I'd say 90% of the horses we drive are standardbreds. The standardbred is a horse that they use on the racetracks as trotters and pacers. Almost 90% of those aren't fast enough to stay on the track. If it weren't for our horse driving people, they would become dog food at an early age. They come to the auctions, they come to the farms or the families. They drive them for another 10, 15 years. They're always traffic safe because they're so well trained on the racetrack. They're driven every day, they're with trucks and trailers, they never shy at a school bus, or hardly ever. School bus, semi, school bus on a slushy road, that's really spooky for horses. They don't. Locally bred horses do. We have a locally bred standardbred. It's almost like a mid-life crisis horse for me. It's just about too fast.

I fear I'm giving you the idea that small scale horse powered farming is the utopia. It is not. To say that the Amish have not been affected by the industrialization of American agriculture wouldn't be true. Slowly but surely we get caught in its choking grip. First to go with the egg market, which was the mainstay of the area's small farms 'til 1963. Some of you remember the lucrative egg market we had. Every farm had a flock of 300-500 laying hens, and that supplied a weekly check. They would pick up the eggs every Thursday, leave empties for the next week, plus the previous week's egg check stuck in the empty cartons. Very, very good. The whole family could help. That market disappeared as the cage layers came in and the supermarkets.

Then, of course the White Leghorn Hen came in, instead of the brown egg laying hen, because 4 or 5 could live in a little cage. Every little town in our community had a hatchery, Mount Hope, Farmerstown, Sugar creek, Berlin, Kidron, Orrville, Wooster, Millersburg, all had hatcheries producing hatching eggs for the local farms. Now we order them from Meyer's in Pennsylvania. Wonderful birds. If you ever need birds, Meyer's Hatchery in Pennsylvania, they have broilers that are really, really good. This is just an aside. I am not employed by the hatchery, but we grow their broilers for our own use. Plus, we have laying hens like the Golden Comet and Golden Buff. We have 15 hens, most days 15 eggs, sometimes 14. The yolks are orange. They actually taste like eggs should, not this white runny stuff you buy in the store.

Now, the next to go was the broilers with the large broiler houses. We used to grow 200 broilers and do very well with them. That market went. Then, the turkeys in 1970s. The large turkeys. We have a neighbor again, now growing 1500 turkeys in three batches, 500, 500, 500. Has a real good market for them. He raises only toms and they go to somebody else who then markets them.

But dairy farming is still our communities' main income. We have quite a bit of vegetable growing now. Fast forward here, in 1997, we had a meeting in our farm shop. What could we do, about 15, 20 farmers? Rob Schlaubaugh was instrumental. The older Mennonites up in Shiloh, the Martins, Mark Martin, Earnest Martin, their dad, Alvin. He sat on the couch with our coon dog. We asked, "What can we do to value add our farm product to keep our young people in farming?"

Some of you are probably familiar with Joel Salatin from Virginia. He said, "In order to have a sustainable agriculture, (Sustainable doesn't mean a lot anymore, it's like natural food, strict 90s natural too) we need to romance young people into farming." He used the word romance; I'm not sure how he meant it, to attract young people into farming. There are three things absolutely crucial to attract these young people sitting here. Number one is, we have to make money. Farming just for the thought of it eventually wears out. Number two, we cannot be overwhelmed with work all the time.

Here, again, I bring my father into the picture. He had a firm belief not to work, take the team to the field after chores. We do it earlier now. We used to milk at 5:30, and now we do it at 4:30, an hour earlier.

Once we unhitch at 4:00, unharness the horses, turn them in the pasture where there's shade, spring water, and grass, the evenings are for whatever you want to do. And I share his philosophy, and my sons-in-law and sons share that thinking. The evenings are free. Not always, occasionally it's going to rain and there's hay out there that needs to be bailed, but, as a whole, we have the evenings free. Same with Saturday afternoon; my father would look at Saturday evening sort of as the Sabbath to unwind, slow down, get ready for the next day for services. Just have a peaceful, restful evening.

Anyhow, getting back to, what can we do to value add so we can keep our young people in farming? We've decided to go with organic dairy. There were eight of us, actually only one was certifiable, that was Mark Martin from Shiloh, Ohio, we said, "Let's go with it." We had no market until 2002 when Organic Valley came in and started buying milk. In 1997 there were no certified organic dairies in Ohio. It's now probably around 200. It has worked way beyond their expectations. The farmers are... Stop to think. This winter they were getting \$40/100 for their milk, almost twice what the conventional milk is. And it's not that hard to do.

Just one story yet, for the corn growers in here. We had a test plot on our farm. I did the cultivating. I take no credit for it, but I love to cultivate. It's just wonderful. It beats golf. I've never played golf, but I'm sure it beats golf. We planted 17 varieties. The average was 220 bushels per acre. They all averaged over 200. That was organic. No sprays, no fertilizers, just manure. Plowing down lyme, maybe several years before. We tried to put up on about 1,000 pounds of lyme per acre every year, but we split it over four years.

I'm going to leave it... Just like our faith, let's keep it – we heard of this – let's keep it as basic and simple as we can. Stick to the gospels. Preach the gospel. As Christ said in Mark, "Repent and believe the gospel." Keep it simple. Let's stay away from the doctrines, and the theologies, and making things difficult. Let's keep it simple. "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

It's time to quit. I'm sure I didn't cover what I should have covered. This is what our communities... And I'm not taking any credit for it. These are the people that had the vision a hundred years ago. Let's do what we can to survive as kingdom Christians in a... maybe "hostile" is a little too harsh, but, maybe, in a threatening world.

Question and Answer Time:

Matthias Overholt, Sarasota, Florida: Is your church group involved in growing genetically modified organisms?

David Kline, Jr: There are some, but more and more not. Of course, in organic, nobody is. It's interesting. They say there's still no proof that genetically modified foods are harmful, but here's a study. In 1940 Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma was practically unknown, one of the rarest cancers in the world. It has become probably one of the more common ones. If you look at graphs, autism, in 1995 when the graphs of crops planted in GMO corn and beans went up, autism follows that scale up.

I'm a simple farmer and this is just my thinking: How can I be a peaceable, nonresistant, Anabaptist, and poison the people downstream? To me, it just doesn't make sense, but that's just my opinion. I guess everybody's entitled to my opinion.

Let's look at autism. When we visit our daughter in New York, we go into Syracuse and catch Amtrak. There are two billboards. 1 birth in 89 is autistic. That was in 2012. In 2015, it's 1 birth in 68. In two years time, it dropped from 89 to 68. In the Amish community, it's 1 in 10,000.

Now, what's happening? I like to blame the cell phones. No, we don't know.

There was study done by some doctors in Germany and they think we marry at a younger age. Our young women have their babies in the peak of their lives and that may make a difference. Where the main society, they may have a career and not have their babies until their mid-30s or 40s. I don't know.

We all know hatching eggs in the middle of their egg laying cycle is when the healthy hatch is. That's the largest broilers and that's where these broiler factories... When they build a new house, they give them the best hatch, so it looks like the new house works so much better. It's from the middle of the egg laying cycle. They're tricky.

This autism graph just follows that right up. Thyroid cancer, the same. I think bladder cancer. Diabetes. It's unreal how it follows that graph from 1995 up to now, just right with the acres planted.

You know what GMO means? God Move Over.

Sam, Worthington, Indiana: I have a question. What percent of your young farmers are starting up farming without having a dad, a grandpa, or someone behind them that gets them started interest-free? I understand with \$40 milk, that was unknown in my day. But what percent of young people are starting up without some financial support from their dad or grandpa like that?

David Kline, Jr: We have a case right now in our community, they're just starting to milk in their new parlor. They bought the farm for \$850,000, bought a herd was 70 head for another \$200,000, without help from dad. From the helping fund, low interest money. Milking 70 cows at \$40/100, it'll add up and they're doing it. We have now farmers buying farms that were carved up for development and the farmers are buying the farms. That's simply because of one reason: organic milk.

Organic is not traded on the Chicago board of trade, so the large agro corporations have no control over it. That's wonderful. The young farmers know from the first of the year what the price will be for the rest of the year. It gets them a goal to budget on.

I encourage you. I think for our plain communities, it's the answer. There is a shortage of organic milk. The consumers are starting to wise up that this artificial slop isn't good for us.

You have a very good question. There's also the scarcity of land. It's so high priced in our community, but we have a lot of enthusiasm.

We'll have an organic conference this next Saturday; it's unbelievable, the response of people. It's the first one. They have a real good organic conference in Maine. They have one in Lacross, Wisconsin, and one in California, but none in the Midwest. There's a lot of interest, and the farmers are a delight to be around because they're happy. They're like those Alsatian Anabaptist farmers. They're joyful, they're happy, and that's important. If we're happy, we have a sparkle in the eye. Money shouldn't be doing it, but it sure helps. We know the love of money is the root of all evil, but we have to pay our debts.