

Column

I must admit I have not taken the time to examine the subtle differences between Amish and Mennonite, both coming out of the Anabaptist movement in Germany. Nevertheless, I enjoy visiting the fruit and vegetable market operated by members of one or both of these groups located in Delano, Tenn. The trip from Blue Ridge takes a little over an hour and is well worth making.

Driving down the narrow road leading to the market, one is likely to get behind a horse-drawn vehicle driven by a man with a beard and distinctive haircut. From the carpark, one is able to see over into the fields where the food is grown. No gasoline-powered equipment is used, and one or more windmills can be seen in the distance pumping water.

The produce along with baked goods are displayed in a partly enclosed pavilion. Depending on the season, there are troughs containing strawberries, blueberries, tomatoes, corn, White Acre peas, green beans, okra . . . well almost any

fruit or vegetable you seek to have on your dining room table. At the till, friendly young men dressed in the plain garb of the sect add up your purchases on mechanical adding machines from 60 to 70 years ago. Only cash is taken.

In a world dominated by news of violence and discord, it is good – even for a few minutes – to step outside that world into more peaceful surroundings. Just perhaps this was the way the Creator intended His human creatures to live. Lines from a poem by William Wordsworth come to mind:

“The world is too much with us; late and soon, /
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;— /
Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given
our hearts away, a sordid boon!”

With that said, I doubt many of us would be willing to give up our motor cars and other modern conveniences. Nevertheless, visiting an Amish / Mennonite farm and experiencing its tranquility should not be missed. It can remind us of the source of our daily bread. It comes from God. He sends the rain and the warm summer sun. He puts life into

seeds and causes them to sprout and bring forth food.

With the rise of modern distribution methods and supermarkets, the connection between God, the land and the food that appears on our tables has been obscured. Visiting Delano is a corrective.

God is the giver of our daily bread, but man has a part to play in this operation as well. He ploughs the field. He sows the seed. He tends and weeds the furrows. And, in the end, harvests the crops. Whether we farm or make our living doing something else, we are all called to be “workers together with God” in our time on this earth. Surely, we need to be reminded of our part in God’s plan as well.

Finally, the farming operation conducted in Delano brings people together and promotes community. The outdoor atmosphere encourages people to talk to one another as they examine ears of corn, pick through peas and try to decide which bake goods to buy.

In today's world so much commercial activity takes place behind computer screens and on smart phones. As a result, incarnate human interaction is limited or lost. Who can doubt that there are emotional and psychological consequences. Visiting the Delano market and buying responsibly produced produce is good for the soul as well as for the body.

Whatever the shades of beliefs of the Amish and Mennonites, they have and continue to make an important contribution to contemporary American life. Why not make the trip to Delano or to some similar site and see for yourself?

ALMIGHTY God, who hast blessed the earth that it should be fruitful and bring forth whatsoever is needful for the life of man, and hast commanded us to work with quietness, and eat our own bread; Bless the labours of the husbandman, and grant such seasonable weather that we may gather in the fruits of the earth, and ever rejoice in thy goodness, to the praise of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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