



# THE GREAT LIE

*Searching for Heaven on Earth*

## **A Trip into Utopia:**

**1: Introduction**

**2: Ephrata Cloister *Community of the Solitary***  
(Pennsylvania)

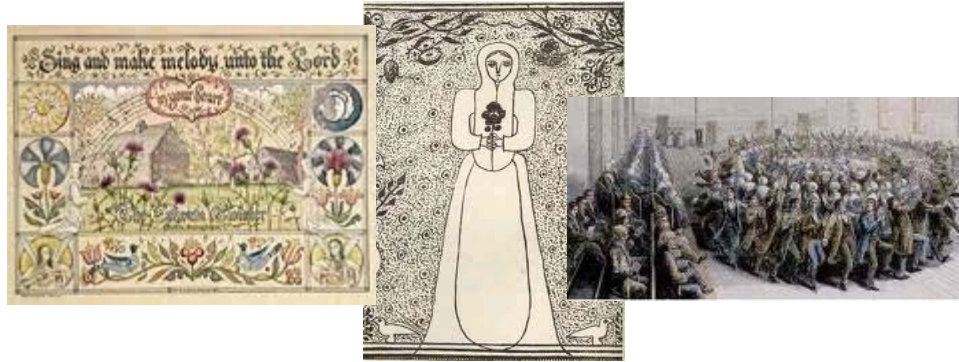
**3: Zoar *The Society of Separatists***  
(Ohio)

**4: Oneida *The Perfectionists***  
(New York)

**5: Amana *The Inspirationists***  
(Iowa)

**6: The Shakers *United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming***  
(Nineteen Communities)

**by Reynold R. Kremer**



# The Great Lie

## *Searching for Heaven on Earth*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourists travel across the country visiting the fascinating historical sights operated by state and local governments. These sites provide interesting information about the people who came before us and established their mark on our society. Certainly many of our church members have visited sites that have not only historical but also religious significance such as Amana, Iowa, or one of the Shaker villages. Many of these historical landmarks share something in common. They are the religious Utopian communities of the 1700's and 1800's. These communities were part of a vast movement that attempted to build societies living and working in perfect harmony, politically, religiously, and socially. Over 130 of these communities emerged in the East and Midwest\*. We will take a look at a few of the religious communities that sprang from the roots of early Lutheranism called Pietism. This theology emigrated to the American colonies thanks to the invitation of William Penn who opened the doors of Pennsylvania to any religiously persecuted people who wished to partake of his "Divine Experiment". The intensity of pietistic beliefs came in many levels. The group of people who formed the colonies we will study took those beliefs to radical extremes and often added mysticism and communism to their teachings. Their ultimate goal was to establish heaven on earth, Paradise, or as some called it, Utopia. Although these communities developed independently of one another, they all shared certain characteristics common to all. Who were the leaders and the followers? Where did they come from? How did they treat the Gospel message? Have any of them withstood the test of time?

\* Some communities were strictly secular in nature while others were based on religious ideas. Both types arose at the same time and behaved in similar ways.

### THE CAUSE

To understand these communities, we must reach back into history and search out their origin. To a greater extent most of them can be traced back to one movement that came about as a result of the Reformation of Martin Luther. Luther died in 1546. The next 150 years proved extremely difficult for the fledgling Lutheran church. Four factors took a huge toll on Lutheranism.

1. In the mid 1600's Europe, particularly Germany, was plagued with the Thirty Years' War. Prof. M. Lehninger writes, "Germany had been a broad battlefield upon which Germans, Swedes,

Frenchmen, Spaniards, and other nationalities had rendezvoused and waged war for more than a quarter of a century. As an aftermath, Germany lay prostrate, bleeding from a thousand wounds. Many of its cities, towns, and villages were in ruins. The communal life of the nation was disorganized. Many people had been killed, soldiers and civilians alike, while villages lay desolate, its inhabitants having either fled or having died in the plagues which were ravaging the country.” (Essay “History of Pietism”.) This extreme unrest created the ideal atmosphere for a new, vibrant movement within the church.

2. The society of that time operated under the concept of a State-Church. Even at the time of Luther the rulers of the various cantons pledged their support to a religious cause. Rulers who remained true to the gospel provided much help for the young Lutheran church. Others, however, were merely concerned for their own power and control and cared little for the truth of the message. Thus Christianity, and Lutheranism in particular, in many areas became a church in name only with little concern for content causing many people to feel a growing hunger for the Word.
3. The third problem facing Lutheranism is that it became a church that was totally consumed with doctrine. This “Orthodoxism” sapped the energy of the church as pulpits were used to argue and promote particular doctrines up for debate which often led to a disregard for the person in the pew. The needs of the parishioners were not addressed, and mission work came to a standstill.
4. Many Lutheran pastors did not practice what they preached and were not faithful to the Word.

Lutheranism was fighting for its existence. Thus the stage was set for new ideas and ways. A response was forthcoming.

## THE RESPONSE

Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), searching for guidance in this predicament, arose as the “Father of Pietism”. He had, “just cause for complaining about the spiritual conditions of his time. Who will doubt his sincerity and zeal in attempting to do something about these conditions?” (Essay by E.W. Wendland “Present-Day Pietism”) Spener achieved his popularity after writing a preface for some sermons by John Arndt titled *Pia Desideras* or “Pious Wish”. This became one of the most influential discourses of that time. In his writing Spener listed six areas that he felt needed to be addressed by Lutherans.



1. The Bible must be studied more by the people.
2. Attention should be given to the universal priesthood of believers. All Christians had the right and responsibility to instruct and exhort one another.
3. The Christian faith must be an active faith. Knowledge alone is useless without putting such faith into action.
4. Christians must be considerate of others when dealing in religious controversies.
5. More attention is needed to be given to the moral development of the pastors.
6. Sermons should be aimed at the hearts of the listeners instead of being caught up in rhetoric.

Most would agree that the six proposals were within reason to correct the problems of Lutheranism. Spener’s suggestions received wide acceptance among Lutherans. Eventually the baton was passed from Spener to August Herman Francke (1663-1727), founder of the University of Halle and supporter of many mission and benevolent projects. Neither Spener nor Francke wished to

disassociate themselves from the Lutheran church. Lutherans were to consider leading a more pietistic life. Thus Pietism was born. However as with most movements, the pendulum began to swing too far in the other direction. Soon problems began to surface.

## THE PROBLEMS

When implemented, the suggestions of the pietists met with new significant problems.

1. By placing more emphasis on reaching into the hearts of the people, sanctification came to the forefront at the expense of justification. The ears of the people itched to hear about living lives more in tune with the Law than the Gospel message of salvation. Works became the driving force behind their belief, leaving the redemption found in Jesus Christ in the background. This is a serious deviation from the message of Scripture that says it is because we have faith in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord, we will live lives that reflect that faith. First justification, then sanctification. Spener himself wrote, "No one will be justified other than those who are intent upon sanctification." Another pietist wrote, "If one gives himself entirely, and in all his life, to the will of God, he will presently be possessed by the Spirit of God." People also placed great significance on their emotional experiences even citing the exact moment of their conversions. Decision theology took root (and has been misleading the church ever since.) Christianity began to be measured by the intensity of the individual's works, not the work of Jesus Christ.
2. Home Bible studies also took a turn for the worse. The local conventicles or small worship groups began to show an air of superiority over congregational worship. The small home congregations took on far too much significance at the expense of losing touch with a liturgical and prescribed order of service. A new standard of super-holiness began to arise.
3. The doctrine of adiaphora (things not expressly commanded nor forbidden by God) took on a new meaning. Many things that were truly adiaphora like dancing, playing cards and even laughing were now forbidden. New "feel good" laws were introduced as necessary for salvation.
4. Pietists also began dismissing a view of original sin. They did not, for instance, believe that infants held within themselves the stains of original sin passed down from Adam as Scriptures teach. They replaced the doctrine of original sin with the false concept of perfectionism, a state in which one could rise above the ravages of sin. Some even went so far as to believe that they could not only reach perfection but rise beyond the reality of death itself.
5. In the hope of becoming all things to all people, the pietists began to disregard the need to teach the myriad of biblical doctrines. The Lutheran overemphasis on Orthodoxy caused the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction leading to a total disregard for biblical doctrines. Luther was adamant in stressing the need to teach doctrine. He wrote his catechism for that very purpose. Christ commanded, "teach them to observe ALL things that I have commanded you." The result was that the pietists became far more accepting of false teaching.

It should be duly noted that shades of Pietism are very much alive in our own circles today. The pietistic philosophy is a subtle, comfortable, and seemingly logical diversion to the true teachings of Scripture. Views among many evangelical, charismatic, and even Lutheran churches are still tainted with various intensities of Pietism.

In this study we will look at some leaders who took the foundations of Pietism to the extreme. What began as a movement to correct problems facing the church of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, turned into a free-for-all for opportunists who began to severely twist and bend the truths of Scripture. Enter the age of Utopia, heaven on earth! The climate was right in 1700 and 1800 America for Pietism to reach new heights. Unfortunately many false teachers arose who hid behind the covers of their Bibles while they invented all sorts of perversions and false views of Scripture that sounded just right in the itching ears of unsuspecting followers.

## THE PERVERSION

Thanks to William Penn's "Divine Experiment", persecuted religious groups of all shapes and sizes began to pour into Pennsylvania. People arrived from Germany, France, Switzerland, Russia, and many other European and Scandinavian areas. Many of the immigrants included former Lutherans now espousing the teachings of Pietism. Some of these people came with large groups of followers while others were individuals who wished to live in solitary. These people took the tenets of Pietism and added many false teachings that were completely against the teachings of the Bible. Sexual perversion, self sacrifice, and celibacy, were just a few of the schemes that were developed to attract groups of followers. Some communities like Amana mixed pietism with mysticism that professed divine speaking by people they believed were specially chosen by God. The pietist emphasis on work righteousness led them to the conclusion that if one would just live the perfect life, one would find Utopia right here on earth. Through Pietism they believed that you could match the holiness and joy that exists only in heaven while still in this life. They wanted the heavenly conditions while still on earth, a very subtle form of millennialism. There were many of these religious societies that surfaced. Some we will not have time to study like the Moravians or Church of the Brethren in North Carolina, the Old Bethel Village in Bethel, Missouri, the Harmonists of New Harmony, Indiana and Ambridge Pennsylvania, and the Janssonists of Bishop Hill, Illinois. This course will take a look at five groups:

**AMANA:** *The Community of True Inspiration (Iowa)*

**EPHRATA CLOISTER:** *The Community of Solitary (Pennsylvania)*

**THE SHAKERS:** *United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming  
(Nineteen communities in eight states)*

**ONEIDA:** *The Perfectionists (New York)*

**ZOAR VILLAGE:** *The Society of Separatists (Ohio)*

## COMMUNAL SIMILARITIES

Although each of these communities was unique unto themselves, they shared many traits.

- Instituted by religious communitarian societies.
- Considered themselves to be a separate and consecrated people.
- Lived apart from the sinful world.
- Built a city of God and awaited the second coming.
- Did away with the clergy.
- Certain elected persons might be perfected by faith.
- Designed to be totally self-sufficient communities.
- Governed by scriptural rules.
- Removed individuality.
- Developed profitable items that contributed to their economies.
- Placed great emphasis on sex—most included celibacy.
- Wanted to recreate a heaven on earth.
- Did not believe in the sacraments.
- Opposed institutionalized religion, especially Lutheranism.
- Opted for a simpler more individualized Christianity.
- Frequently included mystical elements that connected them with God.

- Began in Europe and moved to America after persecution.
- Often Germanic.
- Had charismatic leaders who created a cult-like atmosphere.
- Believed in equality of race, gender, and age.
- Believed in communal sharing of all property.
- Many worshipped on the Sabbath.
- Refused to go to war and sometimes to pay taxes.
- Believed salvation here on earth came through hard work.

## NOTES

► Before we begin our travels across the country, it should be explained what Pietism is NOT. We must be careful not to confuse Pietism with piety. Genuine piety is a characteristic of sanctification that results from faith in Jesus Christ. We all strive to grow in our piety as we become more godly in our Christian life as a loving response to our Savior for what he has done for us.

► As mentioned earlier, each of these five communities is today considered a historic site. In every session you will find brief visitor information regarding these landmarks. Many of the original buildings have been restored and provide fascinating museums. Although their religion cannot be condoned, the study of these people is nevertheless educational. They stand as monuments to the tragedy that was the result of adding human teaching to the inspired truths of Holy Scripture. If you have the opportunity, take a trip to visit these interesting locations. All are open to the public and gladly welcome visitors.

## DISCUSS

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote an excellent treatise on the dangers of Pietism especially relating to the communal societies we will be discussing. Before beginning this study, read and discuss Colossians 2:6-3:4.



# The Amana Colonies

## Community of True Inspiration

Amana, Iowa

1855-1932

*“Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. Descend from the crest of Amana, from the top of Senir, the summit of Hermon, from the lions’ dens and the mountain haunts of the leopards.” Song of Songs 4:8*



Scripture says: **“For a time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” 2 Timothy 4:3,4.**

***Amana (today known for the appliance company which had its beginning in the Amana colonies) is a favorite place to visit in central Iowa. Not to be confused with the Amish (who also have a settlement not many miles away), the many Amana landmark buildings in each of the seven villages make for a fascinating visit. The clock company and woolen mills are operating but owned by private companies. The Amana religion still holds worship services on Sunday mornings in German and English.***

## HISTORY

Amana, Iowa was founded in 1855 by a group of German Christian Pietists called Inspirationists. It became one of America’s longest lived and largest single communal societies. This was a movement made up of working class people. The Inspirationists believed in the teachings of Pietism but included along with it a form of mysticism that taught spirit contact. They were directly opposed to the state Lutheran church in Germany, refusing to send their children to Lutheran schools or to fight in the military. The Lutheran clergy called them instruments of the devil. Early writings of the Inspirationists claimed that they were *“persecuted and prosecuted; fined, pilloried, flogged, imprisoned, legislated against, and stripped of their possessions. And to the shame of the German Lutheran Church of the eighteenth century it is recorded that in Zurich, under the auspices of the German clergy and by order of the city council, their pamphlets were publicly burned by the executioner.”* (Written by Johann Adam Gruber, an early Inspirationist.)

According to the Inspirationists, the Holy Spirit delivered the Word of God verbally or in writing through human instruments called *Werkzeuge*. These people received messages while they were in a trans-like state. Beginning in 1714, some Inspirationists claimed to be given the gift to communicate directly with God. This gift exposed itself periodically through various *Werkzeuge* for the next hundred years. In 1842, a *Werkzeuge* named Christian Metz received word from God that the people were to

move from Europe to the new world. They sent a small group of followers to explore the possibilities, and in 1842 they purchased 5000 acres of land near Buffalo, New York. In 1843 Metz wrote a 35 point document outlining the communistic society that was to exist there. (These communities were established primarily to practice their religion. The theory of communism came into use as a result of their necessity to afford land and building materials.) They named the community Ebenezer. By 1850, the population reached 1,200. The people lived under the agreement that they would not receive wages nor have to buy food, but rather they would receive an annual allowance for making purchases from the village store. They also received free medical care. Eventually Ebenezer expanded to four self-sustaining villages.

In 1854, Metz, again guided by revelations, decided that he and his followers should leave Ebenezer to search for more land. In June, 1855, the Inspirationists purchased 3,300 acres in Iowa for \$1.25 per acre. An additional 4,000 acres was purchased for homesteaders. They sold Ebenezer and relocated village by village to Iowa. Christian Metz died in 1867 and was replaced by Werkzeuge Barbara Heinemann who died in 1883. There were no Werkzeuge after her.

The new Iowa home of the Community of True Inspiration was named Amana, which meant "remaining faithful" taken from Song of Songs 4:8, "Descend from the crest of Amana . . ." Six villages were established named Amana, West Amana, South Amana, High Amana, East Amana, and Middle Amana. The seventh village of Homestead was added a few years later because of its railroad access. The villages were established about a mile to a mile and a half apart from each other, close enough to hear warning bells rung for emergency help. Soon Amana's holdings reached 26,000 acres. A canal dug in the 1860's provided waterpower to the woolen mills, saw mills, gristmills, clock factories and breweries. Also in the 1860's several Amana men were conscripted to fight in the Civil War. As conscientious objectors, the society paid the United States government \$300 for each man in order to avoid the draft.



Although they lived in a separate and distinct world of their own, economically the Amana community did not exist apart from the world. Products from the woolen mills such as their famous calico prints and farm produce were sold everywhere. During World War I, the woolen mills received a large contract for army uniforms. However, in the years that followed, business quickly declined. Tragedy struck on August 12, 1923 when thirteen uninsured colony buildings housing the flour and woolen mills were destroyed by fire. The loss was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. That misfortune was followed by the depression which worsened

their economy even more. By the 1930's, growing industrialization weakened Amana's craft-centered economy. Religiously, as with many of the communal societies, the zealotry of their religion lost its grip on the new generation. Culturally, young people were attracted to the automobile and higher education. The belief in celibacy also hindered any growth from within. Plus, the communist ideal came under question with accusations that many laborers did little work yet still were compensated like everyone else. Eventually costly outside labor needed to be hired to do the work.

The communal philosophy of Amana ended in 1932 when 90% of the members voted to terminate the communal economy and form a corporation called the Amana Society, Inc. which today still manages 26,000 acres of farm and pastureland and over 450 communal-era buildings still standing in the seven villages. The plan to dissolve gave members shares of stock that carried voting rights, plus a number of shares based on years lived in the community. Members could sell their stock to buy the homes they lived in. Communal kitchens and dining rooms were abandoned. However, not wishing to disband their church, they established the Amana Church Society which still holds worship services today.



## RELIGION

The seven Amana colonies were established in 1855 by over 1000 German immigrants who were staunch members of the Community of True Inspiration. They believed to get direct messages from God through their Werkzeuge although there were long periods of time between these seers. During their years in America they had only two inspired leaders, Metz and Heinemann. The people viewed the words of the Werkzeuge as equal with the words of Scripture. They claimed that the Holy Spirit still spoke through representatives the same as was done in the Bible. The Werkzeuge were said to experience violent body movements. During a revelation, the instrument, whose eyes were closed, frequently changed positions, going from walking to kneeling to shaking or lying prone on the floor. Written revelations were called *Einsprachen* while spoken revelations were *Aussprachen*. A recorder always carefully documented these revelations in writing. (Today there remain many volumes of revelations that are still being translated from German to English.) Affairs of any importance were governed by revelations, and the members were instructed to obey them.

Their Pietist rules placed special emphasis on works toward the renewal of the heart. This caused them to renounce their ungodly natures and worldly desires and live disciplined, righteous, and godly lives. They opposed Lutheranism's dogmatism preferring a simpler form of Christianity. The Inspirationists claimed to believe in the Trinity, justification by faith and the resurrection. They however, did not believe in baptism or eternal damnation. The Lord's Supper was their greatest celebration, occurring only at the discretion of the Werkzeuge, often years apart.

Members of the church were organized into three orders: the highest rank was occupied by church elders, unmarried adults, and married adults who abstained from sexual relations. The second order contained celibate adults who were less spiritually advanced, while the lowest order was comprised of children and married adults who bore children. Although marriage was permitted, celibacy was viewed as a special gift from God. Unmarried males who were elders lost that position if they married.

Church services were held eleven times weekly, including prayer meetings every evening, a meeting of each order on Wednesday and Sunday mornings, and general meetings on Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon. Services were conducted by the elders since there was no clergy. Children began attending services at age 11. Their churches, located in the centers of the villages, were large open rooms with no statues, altars, paintings or stained glass. The elders sat on a bench facing the faithful. In addition to regular meetings, they held foot washing and Holy Communion.



## LIFE

Amana houses resembled large one-family dwellings rather than community structures. Three or four families occupied a house which was built without a kitchen or dining room. Vegetable and flower gardens were near each house. Trellises for grapevines were attached to the sides of most dwellings. Houses were grouped in neighborhoods served by one of the over 50 neighborhood kitchens scattered throughout the colonies. Breakfast was served at 6 AM followed by a small lunch at 8:30 AM. An 11:30 AM dinner was served followed by lunch at

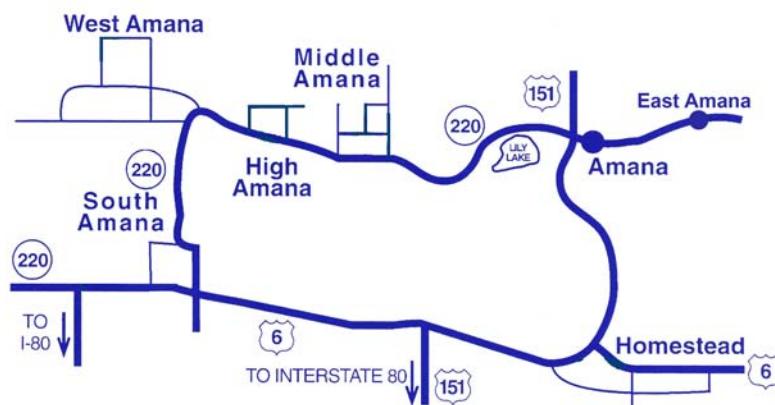
2:30 PM and supper at 6:30 PM. Meals were eaten in silence, using separate tables for men, women, and children. (Every care was made to separate the sexes from little on.) Boys and girls ate with their

mothers until they were 14. At 5 years old, children began school which was held six days a week. They attended until they were 14. Young boys and girls were taught to knit and crochet, while older boys were sent to the factories and craft shops for training. Girls were assigned to the communal kitchens or gardens.

Amana clothing was described by a visitor in 1874, "The men wear in the winter a vest which buttons close up the throat, coat and trousers being of the common cut. The women and girls wear dingy-colored stuffs, mostly of the societies own make, cut in the plainest style, and often short hair in a black cap which covers only the back of the head and tied under the chin by a black ribbon." Amusements such as card games, playing musical instruments, and photography were forbidden.

## TODAY

The Amana Society was declared a National Landmark in 1965. Today it welcomes visitors to this rich area of history. Motels, restaurants, furniture factory, woolen mills, wineries, and historic kitchens, schools, and churches, are all available to the visitor for a very small fee. The Amana Church Society still conducts church services on Sundays in two of the villages. Amana Refrigeration (now owned by Whirlpool), which began as a Middle Amana industry, still employs many Amana workers.



## DISCUSS

1. What does the Lord say about marriage in Proverbs 18:22? How does this speak against a celibate society like Amana?
2. The Werkzeuge claimed their speaking in tongues came from the Lord. How can we determine truth and deception regarding things like this? Read 1 John 4:1-3 and Deuteronomy 13:1-4.
3. The Inspirationists believed there was no eternal damnation. How is this contrary to God's Word? Read Matthew 10:28; 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:9.
4. Pietists believe they can reach a point where they have risen above the curse of the Old Adam. How does Jeremiah 2:22 prove this is not possible?

Photos provided as a courtesy of the Amana Historical Society. Used with permission.