

# Amish GRACE

—by Lenora Hammond

A peaceful Amish community is rocked when a gunman senselessly takes the lives of five girls in a schoolhouse shooting. What transpires afterward shocks everyone...

The Christian movie 'Amish Grace,' is based on the book, 'Amish Grace – How forgiveness transcended tragedy.' It is a powerful account of the 2006 true story of a mentally unstable man taking Amish school girls hostage and killing several of them. The story takes place in an Amish Community in Pennsylvania, and recounts the tragic events of bitterness and revenge, and how these affected the lives of not only the Amish Community, but also a journalist and a grieving 'Englisher family' (non-Amish people).

### A crisis of faith

Ida (played beautifully by Kimberly Williams-Paisley), an Amish mother of two young girls is forced to come to grips with the implications of her faith after tragedy strikes. She finds herself hurled into conflicting feelings of anger and doubt and feels like an outsider in her own community.

ultimately rests when she finds out how her own daughter had already forgiven just before she was murdered.

### Strict separatists

The Amish people, along with the Mennonites and Brethren communities, have a common history dating back to the 1500s. Originally they were protégées of Ulrich Zwingli's teaching on Reform and particularly accepted the practice of adult baptism as a profession of faith. This was considered a radical alternative to infant baptism and thus they were given the name 'Anabaptists'. Zwingli ultimately disassociated with them as they advocated the separation of Church and State.

The group was not prepared for the persecution that ensued due to their radical assertion that the only true Church was a church of gathered believers who had been baptised by immersion and thus daring to separate the indissolubly linked

### People of peace

Further disagreements ultimately caused the separation of the group into what is today known as the Amish, the Mennonites and the Brethren faith. All three of the assemblies took part in a migration to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The American Revolution was in many ways a time of testing for the three groups.

All were Christian pacifist groups who literally applied Christ's teaching: "Blessed are the peacemakers"; "Turn the other cheek"; "Do not resist the evil one." Their faith taught them to be obedient to governing authorities except in matters that conflicted with what they understood to be God's Law. After the American independence, the challenge was to find »

Based on a true story, Amish Grace causes one to think about issues such as unconditional forgiveness...

Equally moving is the portrayal of the family left behind after the perpetrator takes his own life. The distraught wife says at one point in the movie: 'he chose hell over living with his own family.' Her grief in the wake of the tragedy turns into amazement when she experiences the forgiveness extended to her by the Amish Community.

Woven between these characters is a journalist, whose assignment it is to cover not only the story of the shooting incident, but also to find out more about the Amish faith and if their response of forgiveness is genuine or forced. She discovers that their simple, but genuine, faith offers clemency even in the worst of situations. What makes this come to life for her is that she witnesses Ida's struggle with forgiveness and how she

citizenship through infant baptism. The act of adult baptism symbolised this and they became a staunchly separatist movement.

### The tenets of their faith

Due to severe persecution and the loss of able leadership, the movement became somewhat disorganised. In order to try and bring about unity to the sect, the leaders gathered in 1527 and decided upon seven points of agreement.

These included believers' baptism by immersion; the practice of mutual church discipline (the ban); the Lord's Supper in place of the Mass; separation from Roman Catholic and Protestant churches; the role of Ministers (shepherds); rejection of violence (the sword) and rejection of oaths.

When observing the Amish Communities, it is easy to be critical of the legalism that seems to stand in the way of their genuine faith and desire to serve and honour the Lord. Their modesty

their identity. Just how sectarian, how nonconformist, how German or how American were they to be if they were to grow and prosper in the new Republic?

### A simple lifestyle

Today, the Amish are generally separated into 'the Old Order' and 'the New Order'. The Old Order refuses motor vehicles, public utilities such as plumbing and electricity, educate their youth only up through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, meet in homes for worship and dress in very plain clothing. The New Order

a separated people of God, without blemish. Those members who fall into sin, or forsake their faith, must be dealt with and if all attempts fail they are shunned. This is done not just to bring the offender to repentance, but also to protect the whole church. The purity of the church must be safeguarded at all costs.

### Faith in action

Due to the legalistic and separate way in which the Amish communities live, they are accused of believing in salvation

people do not ignore the importance of James 2:20, "Faith without works is dead." Included in this principle is the belief that as Christ forgives us our trespasses, so we must forgive others. The practical outworking of this faith is demonstrated in the movie when the elders forgive the perpetrator's family for the shooting of their children. This is not to be confused with lack of justice. The belief that all sinners will ultimately stand before God as their Judge is clear, but the personal forgiveness of sins committed against us is essential.

### Interesting facts about the Amish

- Today they are based in Pennsylvania, but originated in Switzerland
- The Amish are known for simple living, plain dress and a reluctance to adopt the conveniences of technology
- A study found that as of 2010 there are 249

be such an integral part of their lives, yet a deeper understanding and humility is admirable and worth noting.

- 000 Amish people in the US
- Today, the most traditional descendants of the Amish continue to speak Pennsylvania German, also known as Pennsylvania Dutch
- The rules of the church, the Ordnung, must be observed by every member. These rules cover most aspects of day-to-day living, and include prohibitions or limitations on the use of power-line electricity, telephones, and automobiles, as well as regulations on clothing
- Many Amish church members may not

Amish do not practice any form of birth control, hence their large families

- The Amish are unrelated to the Quakers, but are often compared to them because of their simple, earnest living.

### Profound Grace

When observing the Amish Communities, it is easy to be critical of the legalism that seems to be such an integral part of their lives. Yet a deeper understanding of them reveals a genuine faith and desire to serve and honour the Lord. So while we may not

This is not just a film to entertain you, but rather a movie with a message. It will touch your heart and challenge your faith.

accepts mainstream Protestant forms of ministry such as Missions and Sunday school and a moderate amount of technologies. The Mennonites too have varied groups, some more conservative than others. But all of the groups are known as 'plain people'. Their primary calling is to be

brought about by works. However, closer examination of their faith reveals that they believe 'Christ purchased Redemption for the whole human race'. Belief in Christ is, however, inseparably linked to obedience to Christ, but plain

What would we do if a gunman murdered our child? Would we forgive? Would we walk in love and go so far as extending grace?

- buy insurance or accept government assistance such as Social Security. As Anabaptists, Amish church members practice nonresistance and will not perform any type of military service
- Because of a smaller gene pool, some groups have increased incidences of certain conditions
- A handful of American hospitals, starting in the mid-1990s, created special outreach programmes to assist the Amish
- Although not forbidden or thought of as immoral, most

agree with many aspects of these plain people, a study of them serves us well.

It helps to remind us of how much we have compromised on issues of holiness, standards of dress, attitudes of forgiveness, piety, generosity and hospitality in our church communities. How much stronger would our own congregations be, if we returned to a simpler and more humble way of life? The movie 'Amish Grace' will move you deeply, and the message of profound grace is sure to inspire. ■

The movie is available from CUM stores

## WIN!

Christian Art Distributors are giving away 5 copies of the "Amish Grace" DVD. To win, send your details to [julia@joymag.co.za](mailto:julia@joymag.co.za)

