

Konrad's Choice

A book review by Mike Atnip

This book review will take a new twist. Instead of reviewing the book per se, we will let it speak for itself by including a chapter. Originally, the plan was to use the chapter as an article ... the truths it sets forth are worthy of deep consideration.

Konrad's Choice by Joanna F. Martin is a book about choices men and women have faced, choices between the flesh or the Spirit. In the chapter we are including in this review, the choice is between material gain or spiritual concerns—a choice to which we in North America are particularly vulnerable.

Every chapter tells a true story, albeit with conversations that are, of course, imagined. The book seems to be aimed toward younger readers, but the many choices portrayed in the chapters are choices we as adults face. Thus the older reader will find this easy-to-read book a challenge and a blessing.

With no further ado, we give the author's preface and chapter 12 of *Konrad's Choice*.

Author's Preface

Hope in Christ affects our choices, and our choices affect our hope in Christ. The hope of glory helped Konrad Winkler to choose Christ and the suffering that followed. This same hope has helped Christians through the ages to face the hard choices that accompany persecutions for the sake of Christ. The collection of stories in this book is a sampling of men, women, and youth who faced difficult choices related to the cost of following Christ. The cost included giving up comforts, advantages, property, family, friends, or even one's own life.

May these stories inspire us to make Konrad's choice our own and choose "the reproach of Christ" and suffering "with the people of God" above the treasures and pleasures of this world (Hebrews 11:25, 26).

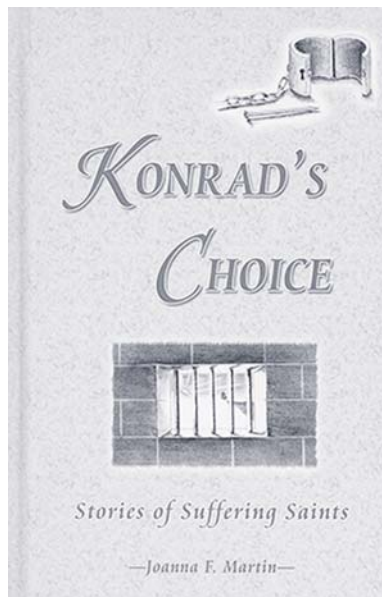
Our Faith or a Farm

This story is about John Graber, an Amish man who lived in Montbéliard, an area in what is today eastern France close to the Swiss border. John was baptized on March 28, 1750, at the age of eighteen. Nine years later, on November 6, 1759, he married Fannie Rich. Fannie's older brother Hans, who was also the bishop, performed the ceremony. John and his bride lived on the farm his father rented from the prince. Their work centered around their dairy herd. They owned about forty cows and churned about 15 pounds of butter per week. During the summer months they took the cattle to the rolling pastures of Clemont, just across the border from Switzerland. (John Graber's first name was actually Hans too, but for clarity we have used the English equivalent.)

John pulled another turnip from the ground and cut the top off. "Here Peter," he said to his young son. "Put this in the basket." Peter took the turnip and dropped it into the half-full basket.

"Father, somebody's coming," little John announced. He tossed another turnip into the basket he was filling. Peter hurried to his father and stumbled over a stray turnip on the way.

John helped his small son up and brushed the dirt off his breeches. He looked across the field toward the road. Sure enough, a man whom John recognized as the prince's messenger walked down the field between the rows of turnips. The prince of Montbéliard had offered to rent his farms to the Amish because they were excellent farmers and helped his domain to prosper.



The messenger handed a note to John and left without further comment. "John Graber and Hans Rich are summoned to meet the prince of Montbéliard in the courtyard of his castle tomorrow," he read. John's mind raced. *Why does he want us?*

"What does the prince want?" little John questioned. "Is he angry with us?"

"I don't know," John answered slowly. "Uncle Hans and I are to go up to his castle tomorrow." He bent down and pulled up two more turnips. "I hope he hasn't changed his mind and decided to make us move out."

His eyes roved across the fields to the white-capped Swiss Alps on the horizon. *We like it here*, he affirmed mentally. *We have bought a nice herd of cows. If only we could own the land too*, he mused. *My father and grandfather both rented land for all their lives. It would be wonderful to be allowed to buy land and be regarded as land owners.*

But wishing won't help anything, he reprimanded himself silently. *I have a loving wife and two dear children. What more could I wish for?* But somehow he could still picture himself, his wife, and his little family on a farm of their own.

Early next morning John and Hans were on their way to see the prince. "I wonder so much what he wants." John puzzled over the short message again, trying to guess what the prince wanted with them.

"I'm sure I don't know." Hans shook his head. A mountain hare zigzagged across the path in front of them. Its black summer coat was speckled with the white winter coat that was growing in.

"Winter will be here before we're ready," John predicted. "I was hoping to finish digging turnips today."

The sun was turning the mackerel clouds to a rosy red when John and Hans entered the courtyard of the castle. The prince was ready and waiting for them. "I need twelve more cows," he explained abruptly. "My wife wants them to be as nearly alike as possible. All the other princes have herds of matching cows, and we want ours to match too. You are good dairymen. I want you to go to Switzerland and find them for me. I want black-and-white cows, all matching. No red ones. Is that clear?"

John blinked, mostly in relief. Was this all he wanted? There was no reason they could not buy cows for the

prince. "We'll do our best," John said aloud, looking at Hans who nodded in agreement. And without further discussion, the men left.

"We need to go home and get some provisions for our trip," John planned aloud. "What if we can't find cows good enough to suit him? What will he do to us if he isn't pleased?"

"I don't know." Hans wrinkled his eyebrows in concern. "The only thing to do is go and see what cows we can find."

Fannie was standing in front of the stone sink, cutting up carrots when John walked into the house. She laid down her carrots and looked up questioningly.

"My worries about what the prince wanted were in vain," he began sheepishly. "I was afraid he would make us move out or something."

"Your brother Hans and I are to go to Switzerland and buy twelve matching cows for the prince," John explained. "But do you think you can make out if I leave?" he questioned anxiously.

"We should be able to," Fannie replied. "Your parents are here to help us."

"But the turnips and carrots must be pulled, and the potatoes must be dug." John was concerned. "Winter will be here before we know it. But above

all things, you must not work too hard." He smiled fondly.

"The boys are getting older," Fannie tried to reassure him. "Surely you won't be gone long. You'll need some food to take along, won't you?"

John nodded, and Fannie pulled a loaf of bread from the wooden bread cupboard on the wall.

While she fixed food for him, John hurried to the barn to have a few words with his father and to bid his sons good-bye. As he passed a small plot of ground by the barn, he saw again the lonely stone that stood there. It was the gravestone of his brother Willi. Willi had died in the spring, just a few months after being baptized. *If only Willi were here to care for the farm while I'm gone!* John thought wistfully.

When John returned to the house, he took the pouch of food from Fannie's loving hands. "Don't work too hard," he reminded her. "It's more important to care for yourself than to care for the horses and cattle."

"You be careful too," Fannie returned. "Those moun-



"All the other princes have herds of matching cows, and we want ours to match too."

tain paths aren't exactly safe. Do watch out for robbers. God be with you."

"God keep you." Reluctantly John pulled himself away from his family and hurried down the road to meet Hans. The men followed the winding Doubs River between the rolling hills and forest of Montbéliard. The oaks and beeches flaunted their golds and reds on every side.

"The land here in Montbéliard is not as good as it was in the Alsace," Hans commented. "But at least we are permitted to rent land here and allowed to have worship services in our homes."

"I wish the local people didn't resent us," John answered. "What else can we expect though? The prince prefers us Amish farmers above the native ones."

"If only the prince would be as interested in our religion as he is in our farming," Hans spoke next.

John nodded in silence. He was often inspired by his brother-in-law's spiritual concerns. Hans truly was a shepherd of the little flock of believers.

After walking the fifteen or twenty miles to Switzerland, they visited a number of farmers. In three day's time, they purchased eleven healthy, black-and-white cows. But, try as they might, they could not find a twelfth one that suited them. "Shouldn't we settle for this one?" Hans asked as he inspected yet another black-and-white cow.

John shook his head. "She won't be a good milker. Now that red one over there. See her build? She'd make a perfect dairy cow. She's better than any of the cows we bought so far. I think we should take her."

Hans considered a bit. "But what will the prince say? What if he's upset?"

"He won't care about her color when he sees her build," John persuaded him. So the transaction with the farmer was completed.

Hans and John drove the eleven black-and-white cows and the one red-and-white cow over the mountain paths from Switzerland to Montbéliard.

As Hans and John drove the cows into the prince's stable, the prince and his wife appeared to inspect them. John watched their faces anxiously and saw the wife's face scowl with displeasure.

"They don't match," the prince stated, frowning.

"They have to match," the wife declared hotly. "Everyone's herd matches and ours must too." In a huff, she marched away from the men.

The prince's frown relaxed a bit as he studied the twelve new cows. "They'll do for now," the Prince conceded reluctantly. And he too walked away.

A bit disheartened, John hurried home. Such a long journey and the Prince was not satisfied! "If the cow were weak, I could understand, but she's not. She'll give more milk than any other cow in his herd. Surely he'll soon realize that," he complained to Hans.

Hans just gave him a soft smile. "We will trust the Lord to work this all out for good," he said.

John felt a bit more cheerful when the familiar buildings of home came into view. He forgot about his troubles when the boys dashed out to meet him. Fannie was salting a pan of butter, but she flashed him a bright smile of welcome.

A few days later John and his sons were trying to get

the last of the turnips pulled when he was summoned to appear before the prince immediately.

What now? He groaned to himself. "We'll need to finish these turnips some other time," he told the boys. "You should help Grandfather with the milking now. Who knows how long I'll be gone or what the prince wants?"

John hurried to the castle. In the courtyard, he met Hans and the prince. "Come into the stable," the prince directed.

Bewildered, the men followed him. *He doesn't look angry,* John decided quickly, *but what is going on?*

"These are the cows you bought me." The prince motioned toward twelve black-and-white cows. "Now tell me which is the red-and-white one," he ordered with a grin.

"That one." John pointed without a moment's hesitation. "She's still the best-built cow of the lot, but how did you make her black?"

"Painted her!" the Prince exclaimed. "I painted all her red spots black. I am well pleased with these cows, and I would like to give each of you a farm in payment for your work." John's eyes widened in surprise. His dream!



"If persecution comes, I'm afraid we would give up our faith instead of our farms."

A farm of his own!

“Yes,” John agreed quickly. “That would be wonderful.”

“We’d better talk it over first,” Hans replied slowly. “We will give you our final answer in a few days,” he told the prince.

John agreed, but he was disappointed. *Why does Hans want to wait?*

As the castle gate clanged shut behind them, John turned inquiring eyes to Hans. “What is wrong? Our fathers and grandfathers have never owned land. This will probably be the only chance that we ever have to own a farm. Don’t you want to own a farm?”

“No!” Hans declared. “If persecution comes, I’m afraid we would give up our faith instead of our farms.”

“Oh.” And John’s hope for a farm vanished like steam from a teakettle. “Do you really think that would happen?”

“It could. ‘Set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth,’” Hans quoted. “We must love the things of God and be willing to give up the things of the earth.”

“You’re right,” John murmured. “I know you’re right, but it would have been nice ...”

“Think of the eternal rewards God has promised to His children,” Hans encouraged. “When we perceive the glory of the heavenly, the earthly diminishes in value.”

“Thank you,” John said humbly. “I’m thankful for a brother like you. Good night.”

John hung his hat on the hook inside the door. “What do you think he wanted now?”

“I’m sure I don’t know.” Fannie smiled up at him.

“The prince painted the red cow black,” John explained. “And he wanted to give Hans and me each a free farm to show his appreciation. I have wanted to own a farm so badly, you know.” He gave Fannie a lopsided smile. “But Hans doesn’t think we should accept it because if persecution would come, we might give up our faith instead of leaving our farm. Do you think we need to be so cautious?”

“I’m not sure what to say,” Fannie answered thoughtfully. “Hans has always been a very conscientious brother. Owning a farm would be nice, but isn’t keeping our faith more important?”

“Yes,” John acknowledged. “Deep in my heart, I think Hans’ concerns are valid and I want to follow his advice. Perhaps I was putting too much attention on our cows and wishing too much for a farm, instead of setting my affections on things above.”

“You’re trying to do what is right,” Fannie assured him. “But this is a good reminder for us to give priority to the things of God.” John nodded and called the boys in for supper.

Three months later, John and his two sons, Peter and John, stood beside an open grave. John’s faithful companion was gone. Fannie had died in childbirth, and the baby died several hours later. Now her coffin was in a grave next to John’s brother Willi.

How can I go on? John grieved. If only I could go with you, my dear Fannie.

John caught himself and looked down at his sons. “Mother is in heaven,” he consoled them. “Someday we will go to heaven and see her.” Somehow heaven attracted him as it never had before. *Fannie is there. Jesus is there. What does earth hold that is of real value?* he pondered.

Suddenly John remembered how the prince had offered him a farm of his own. When he thought of how badly he had wanted the farm, John shivered. Somehow he did not care anymore. “Own an earthly home?” he whispered. “No, my home is in heaven, where Fannie is. Nothing on this earth can be traded for my home above.” ~

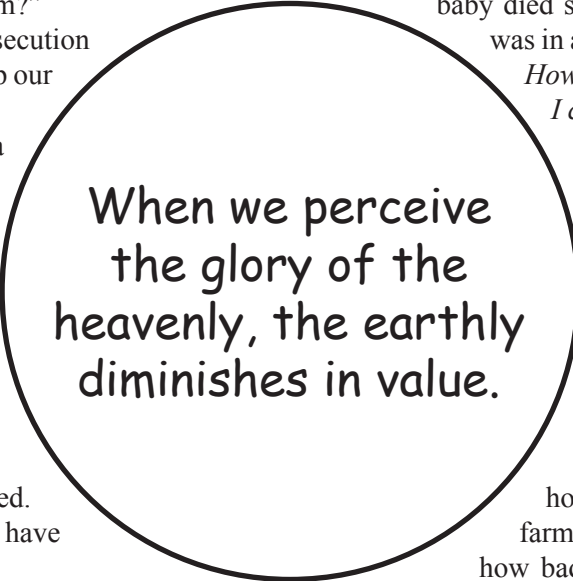
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The Heartbeat of the Remnant does not believe that legally owning property is a sin in and of itself. And most likely, neither did Hans.

True stories like this remind us that sometimes the best economic decision is not always the best spiritual decision.

We profess to be pilgrims and strangers on earth. If that be true, then our decisions and conduct while here on this planet will surely be seen as “strangely strangerly” by those who make their decisions based primarily on the here and now.



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