

ACCOUNT OF FIRST EXPERIENCES IN AMERICA

By Wendel Kalman

This is a narrative of the experiences and occurrences which my wife and I had to fight out here in America on account of the introduction of man-made laws into the congregation of God, and which already has brought about so much disaster and harm to the souls, that it is impossible to describe.

About 29 years ago I started on a trip to America. However, I had already heard a rumor, that those who came to America were compelled to shave off their mustaches. What I did not know was that this had become a man-made commandment or law, and I presumed that it were merely a matter of fashion or custom in which the brothers participated with brotherly love.

Upon arriving in Fairbury, Illinois we stayed with Bro. Irion. That same day old man Steidinger visited with Irion, and there he met me. After looking me over he greeted me only with a handshake (without kissing me) and presently he asked me if I were willing to submit to the customs and order of America. I knew very well what he meant by that, so I answered him "yes". That very same day I bought a razor from Bro. Irion, went into some room and shaved off my mustache. When I met my wife she did not recognize me, until I spoke to her; then she recognized my voice and began to weep. It was not on account of the mustache but because I had so readily accepted these man-made rules. Sis. Irion and I laughed at her as we did not consider the matter a serious one. However, my wife was deeply worried and said that if she had known of this she would not have come to America, namely that one were compelled to win the love of brothers and sisters with such trivialities. She wore a scarf on her head as was her wont in the old country. Then an elderly brother with name of Zimmerman told her that if she only knew how much more love the sisters would give her if she dressed as they did, she would surely do. Then we went downtown together, and she bought a very plain hat. The Sunday after, when she went to church, the sisters surrounded her with great love, to her surprise, and she remembered the warning the old brother had given her. When we returned home she said to me; "Now I can see, that here love is merely attached to costumes and dresses." I told her that it were the same as shaving one's mustache. We had lived there quietly and in peace. Then it so happened that a brother from Hungary with the name of Ratzenberger arrived for a visit. The American brothers were waiting for him at the ship, however, on account of his wearing a mustache they greeted him without a kiss. This brother came to see me in my house and complained of the lamentable situation here in America. On account of his mustache they had rejected him and refused to accept him. Thus this lovable poor rejected brother returned to Hungary with a bleeding heart. Later several other brothers arrived from Hungary and came to Faibury, with the name of: Johan Nagy, Imre Joseph, two brothers Toth, the old and the young Paul Pamer, and Mateis Muntz, who at the time was a friend of mine, and several others along with them. Now even on the first Sunday the elder brothers began to work at these brothers, aiming to win them over with all possible means. This is how they began: "My dear brothers, you have arrived here, and you are welcome here, however, we wish to tell you that you will have to make sacrifices and submit to the order which we keep here in America." The brothers asked the old Steidinger, who at that time was the elder brother, whatever they expected them to do. He answered them, that they were to shave off their mustaches. The brothers deemed such a

demand to be very strange, and much was talked about it, however, without any real result. The next Sunday they were reprimanded again (once more), and much was being said to them.

The third Sunday the talk was being resumed in a more sharp and serious manner, and the Hungarian brothers asked the American brothers to have a little patience with them, at least until they had their families join them, and their wives could see them once more, looking the way when they had parted. Upon this Steidinger sharply said NO, you have to submit, and if you don't we shall punish you. After regarding this I tried to convince the Hungarian brothers and to win them over, which took a long time. Now they have finally shaved off their mustaches, with the exception of one brother Ostermaier, who refused and was punished accordingly. During the working session, when he was to be punished and everyone was to rise, I remained seated. Thereupon Steidinger stood up and asked me: "What is the matter with you, brother Kalman?" I told him: "Dear Bro. Steidinger, you should first tell the brothers (and sisters), in what way the brother has sinned. If there is a sin, I am in favor of punishment." Upon this Steidinger replied: "We are not satisfied with you either." It did not take long for these brothers to grow their mustaches again, whereupon they were threatened and treated in a merciless manner. I felt discouraged after I had seen the elders do wrong in some ways, and I was thinking; I prefer to suffer with my oppressed brothers than to support their man-made laws and regulations by shaving my mustache. After that I stopped shaving. I was particularly induced to this after attending a marriage ceremony of a brother Johan Stoller. He had purchased a necktie for the ceremony. When the time came for conducting the ceremony, Steidinger was standing at the pulpit, calling the brother by name. When the brother approached, Steidinger grabbed the necktie and attempted to tear it off, without succeeding. Then he said to him: "I want to see you take it off." Full of shame, poor brother Stoller sat down in front of the entire congregation, took off his necktie, folded it together and put it into his pocket. After that Steidinger asked brother Stoller: "Did I wrong you?" He answered: "NO." Then the ceremony was terminated, after he had forced the brother to tell a lie, inducing him to say no.

I wish to mention another case, concerning a woman who had come from Switzerland, where she had been excluded. After having been in America for many years and having frequently asked the congregation to set her free, the Lord had moved the hearts of the brothers and sisters to have mercy upon her, inducing the majority of the congregation to have mercy. When Steidinger was aware, that the congregation intended to set her free, he stood up and said; "Even if the entire congregation has the intention of setting her free, I still won't do it, even if she goes crazy." I cannot say for sure what her name was, but I think it was Shutteri or Urschilli. Later on it happened that some brothers arrived from Hungary, namely Sorg, Welker and Geipel with their wives. As these brothers were about to arrive in New York, the American (brothers) speedily arranged a brothers' meeting by the wire, which was attended by approx. 500 brothers. That morning they took hold of me and talked to me for approx. three hours. I finally told them that I wished to remain the way God had created me, which prompted one of the elders to say: "If you wish to be the way God created you, you will have to walk about naked." I replied, "I am sorry that you brothers speak in such a manner, however we know that the Savior is the Son of God, and He never shaved one way or another." Krist Gerber then replied: "You have seen the Savior only on pictures." I told them that the Savior had uttered: "As you see me go into Heaven, you shall see me return." And I believe that on the return of our Savior He shall not look whether one has a mustache or not, but whether he is pure of heart. Thus, after a lengthy talk I was

punished. In the afternoon they punished him anyway for not supporting their laws. That same evening the meeting lasted to about 11 o'clock, and they decided which brothers should meet the European brothers, who were about to arrive a day or two later. And if they did not shave off their mustaches, they were not to be accepted. How can this be justified in view of the letter of Witzig to brother Geipel which said: "We punish no one on account of his mustache." Now when they arrived (the European brothers), the American brothers stepped up to them and demanded that they shave off their mustaches. (To this brother Sorg may add, how long they fought). So when brothers Sorg, Welker and Geipel arrived in Fairbury there was a night meeting. However I did not recognize them on account of their mustache being cut off. The next day there was another meeting, and I was notified to participate. When I got there, numerous teachers and elders were assembled. Bro. Geipel asked me: "We have heard that you have been punished." I said yes. He asked me why? I told him he should ask Bro. Witzig, however, none of the American elders wanted to say anything, therefore I told Bro. Witzig: "You should know why you punished me." He answered: "I was not the one who punished you but rather the congregation." I told him that he had done the work and therefore should know. As there was no way out I went on and told them that I had been punished because I would not shave my mustache. Witzig then replied to me: "How can you say such a thing, you have not been punished on account of your mustache." Whereupon I told him to let me know the reason himself. He said: "On account of disobedience, as I had been admonished many times and had been disobedient towards 500 brothers. Thus I said to them: "My dear brothers, you were aware of the fact, that several brothers would arrive from Europe. Therefore you should have waited, without punishing anybody, but rather discussing things with them, asking for advice from the Lord beforehand." Witzig then said to me that they had not known that the brothers would come. I asked: "You really did not know?" He replied: "Of course we knew, but not the time of their arrival." Then I told him: "Now if you had no idea when they would arrive, why did you stay up until eleven that same evening you punished me, deciding what brothers should go to New York to meet the brothers?" Upon this Witzig said to me: "How dare you say anything like that, as you weren't even there?" I told him just to say whether they hadn't arranged it that way, and that they were not to be accepted if they did not remove their mustaches, etc.

We had not much opportunity to converse with the foreign brothers, the American brothers deeming that we might disclose their scheme; nevertheless, the Lord brought the matter out into the open. From there the brothers went to Peoria and several other congregations. Bro. Geipel then became ill and returned to Fairbury, staying with Bro. Fondopel, where I went to visit him in the evening. I had a long talk with him, and he asked me whether I were a brother. After I answered "yes" he continued to question me whether I had been punished. I answered "yes", asking him if he did not know me. He asked my name and then he recognized me, being surprised, as he had seen me several days before that, when I still had my mustache. Bro. Geipel then told me that he had heard from the brothers, if I were to remove my mustache, they would shortly accept me again. After the brothers Sorg, Geipel and Walker had returned to their home, Bro. Fondopel let me know that he had heard from Steidinger, that if Kalman wished to be free he were willing to set him free; several brothers confirmed this, but I did not feel free to act. Later I let my mustache grow again, and after some time had passed I told one brother that if he saw Bro. Steidinger, to tell him that I would like to speak to him. When I went to the meeting on Sunday he asked me out and I submitted my request of being readmitted. He replied: "What do you think? You have been punished on account of your mustache, and now we are supposed to

admit you with your mustache? You will never live to see this happen in America, if you go to Hungary, you may let it grow there.” He further told me: “If you take it off (now) and make a promise not to let it grow again, you won’t have to say anything in front of the congregation and you can be free.” I told him that I would like it very much, if they could accept me as I was. But he said: “not with a mustache.” And thus I was under a penalty for a long time, until the moment arrived when they intended to expel me. They did not want to do it themselves, and brothers from Switzerland were to be introduced to do the job. Then Rigenbach, and I think the other’s name was Kratz, requested me to appear before the congregation in the evening, and after a long discussion I was expelled. After my exclusion I stood up, asking permission for a question. Someone said “yes”, and I told them: “You know that I am poor and that I have little children. I am doing carpenter’s work at my friend Schnetzler, who is frequently doing jobs for believers. Would you give me permission to keep working for him, not for my own sake but for the sake of my little children, who have to be fed (at that time I still live in great poverty)? Several elders deliberated about the matter, then Trittenbach stood up, telling me before the congregation: “We shall have nothing to do with such an obstinate and disobedient fellow and neither shall you with us. May the entire load weigh you down, letting you finally get rid of the rope of Satan in which you are entangled.” Then he asked me: “Did you comprehend?” I said yes, and he told me that I could go now. I stood up and left; my wife followed me, weeping bitterly. When we were outside I asked her why she was crying. She said: “You even ask why, after they have done you so much wrong.” Yet I attempted to console her telling her that she should not take it so hard, and if we had to suffer we were still in the Hand of God. We should even pray for them to God, that He might enlighten them and let them understand what they had done. Thus we went home, but my wife was hardly to be comforted with all this misery, and she has eaten her bread with tears ever so often. As I was forbidden to work with my friend, I stayed at home, and then he came to see me and telling me to come back to work. I saw no way out and finally had to tell him of my expulsion. He wanted to know the reason, and when I told him his eyes became wet. He came again the next day to get me to work for him, and I said to him: “You know that I am poor, and that I have little children. I would gladly work but I am not permitted to.” My words struck him hard, and then he said: “You may work for me from now on, I will put you to work at non-believers and send the other (workers) to the believers.” In this manner the good Lord took care of us. Shortly after a child was born to us, after I had been expelled, and on account of my wife worrying so much in her distress and misery she lost her milk and could not feed the child. We bought milk from brother and sister Johan Kuntzi. However, Steidinger heard of this and forbade Bro. Kuntzi to sell any milk to the expelled Kalman. So when my wife went there to buy milk, Bro. Kuntzi said to her that he had been forbidden to sell her any milk, yet he wanted to go inside and ask his wife. When he returned he said: “We can not give you any milk.” My wife cried and told him: “Now brother, we don’t want you to have any trouble on account of us, we shall go to the unbelievers.” This evidently oppressed him, and he had tears in his eyes; he really wanted to give her the milk for our child, yet it was forbidden. A certain sister had heard of the occurrence and came to see us, shook hands with us as brother and sister and wished to know in particular about the whole thing. When we told her about it, she said: “Dear brother and sister, I have milk enough for myself and for you, have your child come here every day, and I will give here.” We protested very earnestly against this; we were afraid that she might have to suffer because of us, however, she insisted that if we did not send the child to her daily, she would send it to us, as much as we were in need of. Thus the Lord endowed this dear sister with the necessary courage so as not to fear man-made regulations. That summer we received milk

from her without paying a cent, however, we firmly believe that the Lord will reward her even more plentiful, if she remains faithful until the end. She herself was a sister, but her husband had been expelled. The name was: German.

The next case I wish to mention concerns a brother Ostermeier. Because of drinking to excess he had a reputation all over America and even in Europe. But the truth of it was as follows: Bro. Ostermeier boarded with Bro. Kintzi, and he, too, had a mustache. Then Steidinger said to Bro. Kintzi: "Look Kintzi, you happen to have a large and wide door in front of your house." Kintzi wanted to know why he told him this, and Steidinger replied: "You have Ostermeier in your house. He has a mustache, and you may not keep him here any longer." Thereupon Kintzi told Ostermeier that he would have to leave his house, mentioning the reason. (For Kintzi was very much afraid of Steidinger). Being ejected in this manner, poor Ostermeier looked up an unbelieving German and asked him for a little space where he could stay over night. The man told him, that he did not have enough room for himself and for his children. Then Ostermeier asked permission to sleep in the barn. There was little room to spare there even, but the man gave him permission, and the poor brother lodged in the barn during the entire summer. When the man found out, how short of food Ostermeier was, he asked his wife to do a little more cooking, so that the poor man could eat with them. Because the man being so good to Ostermeier, the latter bought a small keg of beer as a present for him; this was on a Saturday night. Being exhausted from his work, Ostermeier did not attend the meeting on Sunday morning. In the afternoon he went to the meeting. He had consumed 3 or 4 glasses of beer during the forenoon. One could not tell whether he had drunk too much, but the word spread that he had stayed away from the morning meeting to get drunk, and that even with unbelievers. This accusation was untrue. Of course he was punished, moreover because of his mustache. In order to disgrace him they said he was punished on account of his excessive drinking. I asked him to see me, I told him how sorry I was for his having to sleep in a barn. But he refused and said he did not want to cause me any trouble, as had been the case with Kintzi, who had to eject him.

And thus much misery and heartache has been stirred up because of the mustache. I have had great misgivings, that one day these elders, who introduced man-made laws and regulations and set them beside the commandments of God, will be held responsible. For it is written that one shall love his enemies, whereas here they ask you to hate your neighbor if he does not shave off his mustache. I have often been reminded of the word: Woe to him, who adds to or takes away from the Word of God.

I wish to mention yet, that, at the occasion of my expulsion my wife was also present at the meeting, but she was never questioned, if she had seen anything about me that might not be pleasing to God, or anything about my way of living or conduct. They never offered her a word of consolation, even though she was a full member of the congregation, but let her leave with all her great sorrow. Thus the waves of misery washed over us, one after another, yet the Lord was with us. We continued to go to the meetings regularly on Sunday and on Thursday. One Sunday afternoon, we were standing in the yard after the meeting with brothers, sisters and friends. It so happened that an old brother David Schmidt came along, shaking the hands of friends, but passing me by. After shaking the hands of all the others he came back to me and insulted me by calling me names: "You blemish, you should be ashamed to attend the meeting. It were better for you if you stayed home instead of coming here as a scandal. Aren't you ashamed to come here, you scoundrel?" He added several more bad words; when he had finished abusing me, I

asked him: "Do you have anything else to say?" He said "no". Then I told him, that if he had nothing else to say, he might as well have kept it to himself. He walked away then, and, in passing my wife he said: "God bless you, dear sister, I really gave it to your husband." Next to my wife was a friend of hers (Muntz), who is now a sister. She heard these words with much surprise. It so happened that I met Witzig in a store, and I told him how old David Schmidt had abused me in public, and I added, that if anyone wanted to show me his impatience, he were welcome to it; but he should not have done it in public and in front of the congregation, but rather where no one could hear it. To this he replied: "You should ponder over the reason of your being punished; now you have been without joy and outside of the congregation such a long time, and now you have let them expel you for the sake of a few hairs." Upon that I laid my hand on his shoulder and replied: "Now, Witzig, you have said it correctly, I let them expel me for the sake of a few hairs." This caused him to withdraw his words immediately and to say: "You have not been expelled because of the mustache but on account of disobedience." This proved to me how these people were accustomed to tell lies; they wished to cover up their infamy, but the cover was not adequate. Everything must come to light, and the Lord has taken care of it.

There was another case concerning a man who went to the meetings diligently; on one Sunday he brought his little child along, which refused to quietly sit on his lap but climbed up and down, yet without causing any disturbance. Then Steidinger got up, and, while another brother was still conducting a meditation, called to that man: "You should keep your child in order, you with your black mustache, keep your child in order." This man and his wife had been attending meetings diligently, and they were very decent people, however, after Steidinger had shamed them publicly, they stayed away. This hurt me very much. How many souls may have been lost because of the brutality of elders, who with their own might and power have erected a law. What a blessing it might have been, if they had accepted the advice of the European brothers. At one time Steidinger uttered before the entire congregation that if they permitted their young brothers to wear a mustache, the devil would invade the congregation full of rage, and if the European brothers would not quiet down in a short while, they would prove to them (to the elders) that they also would have to shave their mustaches, on account of their having been so insolent in not even questioning the Swiss brothers, whether they were permitted to wear a mustache or not.

However, the lord has now revealed, that neither the ones in Hungary nor those in America have the privilege of administering a law, and that all those who were responsible for doing so, must do penance for their transgressions; furthermore they are to strive to go in quest of their poor, expelled brothers and invite them in, and then to reconcile themselves with God and all those whom they had wronged, - before the great day of the Lord arrives. This I wish all those who were a part of it. There is one more incident I wish to mention with regard to sister Muntz, who is now living in Akron, Ohio. At that time she also was in Illinois and she had applied for membership through baptism. When it became known that she had also come from Hungary, very little love was spent on her. She had spoke with Steidinger concerning her admission, who sent her to Honeger. Yet Honeger claimed that she belonged to the congregation of Steidinger. The latter could no longer refuse and presented her to the congregation. After she had been examined all brothers and sisters agreed to her admission. It was then that Steidinger asked her what she thought of Kalman, who had been expelled, and of the others, who were wearing a mustache. She told him that she deemed them to be true believers. He asked her furthermore, if

she intended to remain in this congregation in the event of a separation. She said that she did not believe, it were possible to separate the body of Christ, but she did not want to pass judgment in this matter, as she were only a poor, weak friend. But she believed, that those who wore a mustache, and the others, who did not wear one, would all be saved, if they remained faithful. As she could not promise to stay on their side as they demanded, and could not hate those who wore a mustache, she was not admitted; she was compelled to wait several years, until finally the elders came from Hungary and delivered her from the anguish and fear of her soul. They admitted her. As of now she is a faithful sister.

One sister Burian had to suffer much from persecution, because she had not risen when the brothers, who had worn a mustache, were punished. On one occasion Steidinger told her in front of the congregation, that she too had a mustache. She replied: "Brother Steidinger, I have no mustache." But he continued, saying: "yes you have, too: you have a mustache in your heart, of which I am a witness." After having hurt several souls in this manner, he delivered Holy Communion that same evening, without reconciliation. It seems to me, that they made little use of the word of I Cor. 11. Not only were they rude with the Hungarian brothers and sisters, they were brutal also with their own, as any taskmaster would be. One must have pity with them, and may the dear Lord have mercy with them. At one time I had to vindicate myself to the congregation. Among other elders Witzig and Krist Gerber were present. When Steidinger questioned me, I took great care to answer him, so as not to insult him. Yet he said to me: "Shut your mouth, you with your smooth, proud forehead." I turned toward the Lord, praying for patience. Then Witzig put the same questions to me, which I did not answer. So he said: "Brother Kalman, why do you accept such a greeting, why don't you answer?" I said, "You have heard how Steidinger said to me: "Shut your mouth," and that is what I am doing." Then they called me stubborn, etc, however, I kept quiet. At that time we were very poor, and my wife detested these man-made laws. Being so miserable, she frequently cried. "I should prepare a meal now and bake some bread, but there is no flour in the house." I tried to comfort her, but I had tears in my eyes, and I went into another room and wept bitterly. Our faith was being tested in many ways. As we lived in such a misery, Steidinger once asked me: "How can you support your family?" I answered him: "The Lord provided for us." He replied: "I know you are having a hard time, but my heart is closed, and I can not help you. But if you could promise to change your ways (to submit), you might be surprised, how much the Lord could help you."

Oh, when I recollect! Our poverty is indescribable. In a period of 2 to 3 months we were able only to buy 5 cents worth of bones for soup to keep us alive. Yet our dear Lord has provided for us wonderfully up to now. However, Steidinger put it this way: "You have come to America, and you had your fill, and that's why you won't obey. You should have stayed in Hungary and in poverty." Because of our hard life, and having to put up with so much disdain and contempt, we made up our minds to move to Akron, Ohio. Before our departure on Sunday I asked Steidinger to give me permission to bid goodbye to the congregation and to apologize, if I had hurt anyone during the past 6 years. I promised him, that I would not mention the affair with the mustache. But he strictly refused, and I had to leave and I have never returned to Fairbury. When I came to Akron I met several brothers who had been penalized because of their mustaches. They would not bow during the prayers. Although in Akron for some time, the Hungarian brothers intended to separate themselves from the intolerant brothers, yet I advised them to wait, until the Lord would show a way and more brothers would arrive from abroad.

However, these did not come yet in a long time. When we perceived that they took offense at us and considered us an annoyance, even disliking us, their children even hating us, pulling our hairs from behind during prayers; once, at the meditation, someone tried to hit my head with half an apple, but he missed, while the apple rolled forward all the way to the pulpit; then we made up our minds to go out of their way. We had to wait, until brother Schwier came to Akron. We were not admitted to the congregation for uttering our request; instead, he came to see us outside in the yard and spoke to us there. He pleaded with us to have some more patience, and that he would have liked to act otherwise, but that he had to follow the order of Witzig, and several other elders. Then we left, still hoping that we might return some day, after all the human arrangements would have been removed and they came to their senses, frequenting their poor, persecuted brothers and sisters again.

We held our meetings in the house of the farm, where I am still living. Then, at last, the brothers Toth, Csanyji and Milan arrived from Europe. They visited us, read a chapter and prayed with us, however, they did not greet us with a kiss, they wanted to be cautious with us. Later, when Bros. Lochel, Hauter, Schlatter and Hinnen came and examined us carefully, our congregation was established as I remember. I could mention many things yet, but who can recall everything that happened in a period of 29 years. However, what I have written is true. It is my hope now, that the Lord might unify these two congregations before our Savior arrives. This I pray with all my heart. May the intolerant ones desist from their man-made laws and regulations, and love again their expelled brothers and sisters, for without love there is no life. If they have love for us, they will tolerate us as we are. Now all of this be entrusted to God. Much should be written yet, but this is enough for now.

I, Wendel Kalman and my wife Barbara Kalman, give this testimony of the very grievous times we had to live through, but the Lord was with us and has helped us up to the present time.

(9/17/02-Copy of this letter has been transposed into this word.doc format from its previous typed format.)