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8. The Amish Ordnung

A Shared Double Consciousness

Barbara J. Dilly, Creighton University

Abstract

This study takes a critical anthropological approach to examining and critiquing the notion of religious reform from culturally diverse perspectives. It compares Evangelical Lutheran, Mennonite Brethren, and Old Order Amish farming communities undergoing social, cultural, and economic threats to their survival during the 1990s to the present in Northeast Iowa to identify the degree to which resistance to the reform of local religious community traditions and practices allows these groups to survive eroding processes of social, cultural, and economic change in American agriculture. The comparative and longitudinal study argues that the Old Order Amish religious resistance to existential threats is the most effective because it views change from the perspective of an ontological double-consciousness of both living “in the world” and not being “of the world” compared to the “worldliness” of the other groups in this study.

Keywords: kingdom of God, resistance, family farmers, rural churches, critical ethnography

Methodology

Critical anthropology examines the question of religious reform in this paper by focusing on the nature and extent to which religious groups will modify their religious practices during periods of social and cultural change that place considerable stress on their existence as members of farm family communities or whether they will employ their religious practices to resist social and cultural change. Anthropological interest in religious reform acknowledges the centrality of religion in shaping and integrating cultural features. As such, religion is often central in a culture's response to either perceptions of the need for change or resistance to change. Ethnographic studies show that religion often undergoes reform to preserve social and cultural stability by sharpening or tightening cultural boundaries undergoing transitional erosion (Arjomand; Danzger; Goodman; Yukich). Reforms can also become a catalyst for radical cultural revitalization or revolutionary change in response to external threats to stability (Wallace).

One shortcoming of these explanatory models is that they are objective external social science models focused on understanding the functional role of religion in providing emotional security to communal settings (Durkheim). Functionalist perspectives further argue that religion shapes and integrates cultural features undergoing change. As such, they do not understand or explain the subjective meanings of religion in shaping decision-making regarding change or resistance to change in diverse cultural settings. In this study, religious cultures are also defined as religious ethnicities in which religion defines individual and group identity to preserve and defend their *raison d'être*. This shared context for making meaning, however, goes beyond a functional set of social norms and economic rules for participation. It seeks to understand the unified principles that shape those norms and rules.

Traditional comparative ethnographic studies (i.e., ethnologies) of societies engaged in religious reform or revitalization offer useful objective understandings of highly context specific subjective meanings that can be generalized across cultures to further larger understandings of social, cultural, and economic processes such as threats to American agricultural communities. This can further public policy and social action agendas. Sometimes the *etic* (researcher's outsider perspective) comparative categories impose explanations that may not interpret fully the *emic* (insider) experiences. This can result in inappropriate one-size fits all policy formation or insensitive social services support.

A more critical ethnographic approach (Rosaldo) expands our *etic* analytic categories to incorporate new meanings and ultimately new conceptual categories that more closely approximate the lived lives of those we study. Rosaldo challenges the positionality of the scientific model of ethnography by calling into question the mainstream practices of dominant culture framing of questions to engage in a dialogue that negotiates interpretation between ethnographers and the cultures they study. Rosaldo argues that insights do not always come through social science, they can also come through empathy with the studied culture.

This approach to engaged empathetic research has more recently been expanded in qualitative research methods that seek to improve the lives of the members of the communities under study through more effective advocacy. From a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, which is the identification of a common system of linguistic symbols of meaning, the core task of research to identify how people encode meanings and intentions through

language and symbolic systems (Berg and Lune). Research is as much a process of interacting with the people under study as it is about understanding how the people under study interact. Ethnographic research reveals an ever-present tension between our ability to fully grasp insider perspectives if we have not shared fully in the symbolic processes that define their realities. Comparative studies both complicate and illuminate those realities as we struggle to identify categories of meaning that can be illuminated through several cultural lenses. This means not only that we must overcome some of our own cultural biases; in this case it meant also overcoming this researcher's subjective personal piety in empathetic engagement.

Because I grew up on a family farm during the 1950s and 1960s about an hour away from the three communities of my research, it was easy for me to gain access to these groups. Over the years of my research engagement, many members of each of these communities have come to consider me a friend. They welcome me gladly into their homes. Because of the dynamic nature of change in the Old Order Amish community under study, I visit them most often, particularly the home of the bishop and his wife. They are about my age and we have become good friends over the years of sharing many long and deep conversations about farming, family, rural life, and growing older – all from the perspective of our Christian faith. I can empathize with their need to preserve their family centered way of life, their close-knit community, their religious values, and their personal relationships with God. In this sense, I empathize with them. But they know I am also trying to understand them. The Amish know I am a devout Lutheran who works with and greatly respects Catholics as much as I respect the Amish. This reality intrigues them and enhances our shared sense of inquiry as they are as interested in understanding me as I am in understanding them. They empathize with my commitment to see God in all things and all people. Our Christian faith provides the shared symbolic language for defining both *etic* (objective outsider) and *emic* (subjective insider) categories of meaning.

My farming heritage also provided a symbolic system of understanding. Unlike the Amish, my family had tractors, but we did not have running water or central heating and we grew nearly all our own food. I went to a nearby one-room country school and lived only ½ mile from a country church. My community was very close knit in terms of shared labor and material goods. I also enjoyed the emotional support of extended family in the surrounding area and I know what it means to depend on others during times of need and to be willing to share. I also understand what it means to share most of the good times of life in family, school, church, farm labor, and natural settings with neighbors. There is still a barrier, however, to our conversations. While the Amish speak fluent English, they also speak a folk German dialect that I do not speak or understand. I speak some German and can read it reasonably well, but I do not understand the way they think in their primary language.

We do share, however, a common symbolic system of Bible verses. Often, when our conversations get deep into the sharing of our religious feelings and beliefs, the Amish struggle to find the appropriate meanings in English words. It is at these times that I feel closest to them because it means that they trust me. It is not easy or customary for the Amish to openly share their thoughts and feelings about religion with outsiders, especially one with an advanced academic degree. To engage in these conversations is a privilege I value greatly. When the bishop seeks to explain the central meanings of Amish community life, he draws on our shared

biblical language, communicating through Bible verses to best illustrate the decision-making processes of its members.

Anthropologists work to break down the barriers of hierarchical power that comes from an outsider interviewing an insider to set up a conversation among equals. When we reach the point that we are conversing in terms of biblical language, we are drawing on a shared set of symbols that place us on equal footing. It is from this perspective that I can spend hours talking with the bishop and his wife around the kitchen table, sitting near the warmth of the kerosene heater on a cold, winter day. From a critical ethnography perspective, my reflections on what I have learned from and about them over the years of these conversations validate my findings regarding their notions of reform.

The ethnographic study of reform in this paper provides insights regarding religious relevance, efficacy, or integrity from the perspective of “an integral cultural framework,” not theology. This perspective is outlined by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*. From this perspective, social and environmental relationships need to be understood in dynamic economic, social, and cultural realities. It identifies the unified social ethics that further fulfilling agendas for individuals in social groups. As such, the explanations in this paper are offered not as theological explication of Old Order Amish, Mennonite Brethren, or Evangelical Lutheran church doctrine, but as examples of cases studies illustrating the ways members of these group operationalize their religious beliefs in community practice. The anthropological framework seeks to interpret the relationship between religious values and beliefs, practical lifestyle responses, and identity consciousness at individual and collective levels that may further more sensitive understandings of change or resistance to change in religious contexts.

Historical Context

This historical context of this study, a farming region in Northeast Iowa, beginning in the 1990s and continuing into the present, does not represent an isolated scenario of religious response to socio-cultural and economic stress in rural America. Much is known about why so many farm families were losing their farms and rural communities, particularly in the period of rapid decline during the 1980s and the 1990s (Davis; Harvey; Jackson; Lappe; Vogeler; Wines). It is widely recognized, however, that German-American farming communities were the most resistant to this trend (Salamon). What was not known was what diverse German-American farming communities in the same region were doing that shaped their diverse responses and what might be sustainable about those responses. This study examined an Old Order Amish community, a Mennonite Brethren community, and an Evangelical Lutheran community, all within a sixty-mile radius of each other. Their environmental, economic, and political context was the same. They were all also post-reformation Christians. But they were culturally very diverse in terms of their religious values and their farming practices.

This study ultimately centers on the Old Order Amish group. Over the last twenty-five years that I have studied this community in Northeast Iowa, the members have demonstrated the least amount of erosion to their land holdings and their way of life. This paper interprets their religious rationale in a way that may be instructive to other rural religious communities seeking to sustain their family farming ways of life. The Amish group in this study is one specific Amish church group of about 30 farming families in a larger Amish community settlement comprised of six such church groups of equal size. It is a large community of inter-

married and economically networked families. But each small group of about 30 families interacts with each other socially and economically almost daily. This Amish church group was compared to a Brethren and Lutheran church group, each about the same size of 30 farming families with varying degrees of social and economic intimacy.

Data Analysis

While this paper presents an analysis of religion and reform that is largely informal, it does draw on a very formal base line ethnographic study completed 25 years ago for my dissertation (Dilly). The formal study included qualitative and quantitative analysis of religious community values, beliefs, practices, kinship networks, spatial patterns, farming practices, and economic strategies. In the early 1990s, I compared the three German-American religious farming communities in Northeast Iowa identified in this paper to understand the role of religion in resisting erosion to family farming practices during a very difficult period of high numbers of farm foreclosures and bankruptcies. It had been acknowledged by Sonja Salamon that German-American farming communities had amazing staying power amidst agricultural crises. I wanted to understand what it was about their religious ethnicities, not their German ethnicity, that kept them on the farm and in community life. Following the economic sociology of Max Weber and the empirically driven historical materialist work of Eric Wolf, I hypothesized that religion played a powerful role in shaping economic behaviors in specific ways in diverse communities. Guy Swanson further argued that religion slowed the rate of social and technological change. My questions were focused on what was adaptive and sustainable about their religious values and practices in agricultural communities undergoing radical change. Were they relevant? If not, what did they need to reform? Religious denomination leaders wanted to know how they could best train rural pastors to serve these communities. This study revealed, as is shown below, that the reform question was not helpful.

Of interest to the question of reform, I chose these three groups because they were post-Reformation groups. They were also chosen because they had some local autonomy in defining their religious community life. None of these groups were established and managed by church hierarchical structures, as was the case with the Catholic farming communities in the area. This autonomy particularly focused on the selection of who would be their pastors and how they would define the rules of their religious community leadership and worship practices. I was not looking at how they defined and interpreted their Christian faith in terms of theological doctrines or dogmas, but how they lived them out in practical ways in their faith communities outside of external structures of power and authority. I wanted to understand what it was about the faith community practices that emerged from each group's fiercely independent and parochial values and beliefs that helped them resist erosion of their souls and their soils at a time when small-scale operation economic decision-making, land holdings, and rural institutional power were all greatly eroded by external influences. In other words, it was not such much what they believed, but how they expressed those beliefs in material farm community life. In what ways did their beliefs inform the ways they revitalized, reformed or radicalized their community practices to resist erosion of their valued ways of life? How did their religious beliefs translate into individual and community practices that helped them sustain their family farms (the soil) and their farm families and community life (the soul)?

The study operationalized the “soil” and the “soul” for empirical observations as expressions of values and practices of deeply shared meaning for community participation in each neighborhood community’s farming practices. It was not their spoken creeds, but their community membership credibility in actual practice that I wanted to understand. I therefore examined the processes by which each group defined various levels of formal and informal agreements among their members by comparing membership practices, labor sharing, land and equipment sharing, mutual aid, and the role of the church leadership in coordinating these activities.

Findings

Case 1: Evangelical Lutherans

The Lutherans had the most formal theological statements of membership in terms of creeds and their catechism training, the rules for ordination, and a hierarchical church leadership, but they did not translate to many specific expectations for farming community participation. The Lutherans also were less integrated spatially than the other two groups, since they settled the area as individual family farming units. When they reached the point where they could form a congregation and build a church, they called a pastor through the church hierarchy. While their community life was organized around their shared beliefs in a formal theology, their primary shared values were more centered on their shared family farm rural community lifestyles and values of hard-work, frugality, family solidarity, moral decency, and neighborliness. Their spatial distance from each other fragmented their sense of neighborliness and labor sharing. Because members were scattered over a six square mile area in four townships with non-members mixed among them, it was difficult for them to organize shared labor with each other. Their labor sharing consisted more of working in extended family units. They did, however, share resources by renting ground to each other, as was the case of older retired farmers and younger farmers. These Lutherans did, however, share labor with their most immediate neighbors, who happened to be either Methodist or Presbyterian.

Membership in the church is a bit more restrictive. Despite their willingness to interact with all their farming region neighbors, the Lutherans in this study were highly committed to endogamy, which is marrying inside their sect. These rural Lutherans only married other Lutherans, typically marrying Lutherans from other communities due to the small pool of potential partners within their own congregation. Church leadership was gender specific with men primarily serving on the church council and women serving in social leadership roles. When questioned about the equality of the arrangement, one woman asserted that there was total equality, “the men manage the money, the women manage the life of the congregation.” Both men and women taught Sunday school. Both men and women shared in the labor of the maintenance of the church grounds, building, and kitchen, albeit in gender specific roles.

In terms of business decisions, the Lutherans valued autonomous nuclear family strategies. Most operations were organized as husband and wife partnerships with only a few father-son or sibling operations. Nearly all the males and the females were engaged in additional off-farm employment, but they sought to retain their rural identities and values. They continued to see family farms as income operations and investment property. They also saw the family farm as a source of personal, family, and community identity. The family farm

was a critical site for rearing their children and reproducing their values, including a staunch commitment to mutual aid in times of need such as illness, death, and calamity. There were limits, however, to how far they would go to help someone experiencing a monetary crisis. Lutherans were not obligated to help each other during loss of employment or threats of farm operation bankruptcies. For the most part, members had no idea what was going on behind the scenes of each operation and did not “pry” for this information, respecting each other’s individual economic privacy and decision-making strategies.

Despite this economic insularity, there was little evidence of economic difference among the members and they did not compete for status recognition. More importantly, these rural Lutherans greatly valued participation in their rural church community because it allowed them to maintain their distance from urban competitiveness, greed, and status seeking. Lutherans also greatly valued their independence from their bishop in terms of financial decisions regarding their congregation, i.e., what they would tithe to the larger church, as well as their ability to decide on the choice of their next pastor and the terms of hiring and firing should that be deemed necessary.

The shortage of ordained Lutheran pastors makes it difficult for smaller rural congregations to be as selective as they would wish, however. Also, the pool is comprised less and less of individuals who grew up in rural communities or are even white males of Midwest origin. Rural congregations are still typically highly resistant to female, ethnic, gay, and immigrant status pastors. This reality and the existence of the large Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its corporate agendas translates to less sympathy for rural parochial identities and practices. Rural people of every Christian sect have experienced erosion of their autonomy as their cultural hegemony has slowly been eroded in mainstream American life (Shover). The rules of affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church require that local congregations work through a very formal process of selection through the bishop’s office. The bishop identifies the candidates and requires that local congregations provide nationally-normed salary and benefit packages. As the rural economy experiences decline and older members die, these economic obligations become increasingly difficult for small congregations to negotiate.

For the congregation understudy, financial solvency was not a threat because there was no mortgage and members shared responsibility to maintain the church building and the parsonage. But it was an issue in terms of pastoral expenses. The congregation under study was currently undergoing a pastoral search, but there were few candidates to interview. Their local bishop suggested closing the church and transferring their membership to other larger urban congregations. This was devastating to them. Amid their personal financial vulnerability, the church members were also experiencing a threat to the existence of their congregation at a time when they needed it most. The church had been the main source of strength to these farmers for their entire lives and the lives of four generations before them. It was a focal point for individual personal piety and faith, family continuity, fellowship, community centeredness, and ethnic identity maintenance.

The rural church had survived the demise of other nearby rural community institutions such as schools, restaurants, businesses, banks and social clubs. During all this loss, the members strongly resisted giving up what had meant the most to them, and the institution

over which they still retained some local control. They expressed a strong feeling that the lack of a strong commitment from the church hierarchy to support their community eroded their souls. “We thought no one loved us, not even God,” one woman said. It eroded their souls by diminishing their individual courage and confidence. Without the rural church, their struggles to maintain their family farming community way of life had less meaning for their families. It also eroded their collective power to negotiate and further their community interests in an institution that preserved a local structure of autonomy not threatened by external sources of power.

Not surprisingly, this group (and others like it) threatened to leave the ELCA to become an independent congregation. Then, through an act of God, their church was destroyed by a tornado. But rather than give up and turn the insurance money over to the bishop, as the rules of congregational dissolution specify, they used the funds to purchase materials to rebuild. Along with their own labor and that of some of their Amish friends, they rebuilt an even larger and more modern church, with a gymnasium as a fellowship hall. As a result, their membership grew, and they attracted a sympathetic pastor through the ELCA roster. They remained in the ELCA, but they did not reform their parochial practices to align with the larger ELCA national identity. Tensions within the church community over their difficulties with the call of a pastor were resolved (for the time being) and the membership held together. Their tensions over autonomy from the church hierarchy remain. Because of these issues, the ELCA has reformed some of its rural pastor ordination requirements to include specific training for rural ministry.

Case 2: Mennonite Brethren

In comparison to the Lutheran community in the study, the Brethren community also experienced some difficulty in calling a pastor to their rural community, but they were less threatened by their bishop to disband. While the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has become an increasingly urban sect, the Mennonite Brethren are still largely a rural sect and have a larger pool of potential pastors willing to serve rural areas. Also, because of their tight settlement patterns, they can maintain their population density and economic bases in their religious communities. In the case of this study, the membership covered an entire township, and even though it had no business district, it did have its own rural school district with a building across the street from the church. While not all the students were members of the local church, the rural school and the church allowed the Brethren to maintain their religious sect identity and to preserve a sense of local autonomy from the influences of a nearby urban center.

Tight settlement patterns gave them an additional historical economic advantage that was central to the establishment of their community and part of their rules of participation. The Brethren had unwritten community rules of exclusion that Lutherans would never have practiced. The community was established by a group of families who came from Pennsylvania and bought an entire township of land. Thereafter, individuals were obligated to not sell or rent land to neighbors who were not members of the local church. And while the Brethren also practiced endogamy, they were even more selective, marrying not just other Brethren, but preferring members within their own community. This meant that they were a well-integrated kin group as well as a neighborhood. This made it easier for them to share financial aid and labor. Indeed, this group formed family corporations among brothers, fathers and sons, and

sons-in-law to not only share the financial risks of farming, but to expand their operations throughout the region and secure their holdings for future generations.

Like the Lutherans, the Brethren also eschew economic competition and inequality. But the Brethren ritualize their sentiments. Central to the Brethren sense of community solidarity is their practice of foot-washing, which they do four times a year during a special eucharist celebration. Members of the community are expected to take turns washing each other's feet as an expression of humility and servanthood to each other. This serves to remind them, they told me, of the real meaning of their community. Despite their financial stability and land holding wealth, none of them sought to live higher than their neighbors or to compete with them for control over land. Like the Lutherans, they lived modestly, seeking to demonstrate that farming is a way of life, not a way to "make a killing."

Apart from these values of frugality and equality, the annexation of half of the Brethren controlled township into the nearby urban community city limits created opportunities for some families to diversify their family-centered strategies to include the development of housing tracts and apartment building complexes. Urbanization offered other economic activities that threatened their farm family way of life. Nearly all the younger families sent the wives to work in town to supplement their household incomes, so farm operations could further invest in land, livestock, and machinery. In addition, the community welcomed the new urban residents to the area into the church. But they were not farmers. Also, due to a smaller pool of young farmers, farm sons and daughters increasingly married outside of the congregation and even joined other denominations. As Brethren differences in economic activities, backgrounds, and family affiliation became more apparent, members noted that participation in the foot washing ceremony gradually diminished. But this did not concern them as stable church membership secured the economic viability of the church. Farm family units also appeared to be stable.

While local social and economic differences did not erode solidarity in this community, something else internal to the community associated with urbanization did erode their collective soul. As the farm economy tightened and farm income diminished, the men frequently drew increasingly on the salaries of the wives for feed bills and implement repairs. The wives had become accustomed to urban consumer values, having worked in urban settings and socializing with other urban women. As a result, Brethren women began to expect some benefits from their earnings. They were earning middle class salaries but not able to afford new sofas, farm home updates, vacations, or educational funds for their children like their urban counterparts. While the increased diversity in the division of labor within the community did not erode community solidarity, it did render the family dysfunctional in several cases. When several Brethren women filed for divorce, they received their share of the farm operations in the settlements. Several family corporations were forced to sell off land to pay them off, greatly eroding these operations.

A feminist political economy of American agriculture explains what happened. Without the legal right to demand half of the financial holdings acquired in a marriage, as was not the case in the past, a woman is not likely to fare well in a divorce. While women now have these rights, they are not enough, however, to motive farm wives to divorce their husbands, especially in religiously conservative communities. It would not have happened even a

generation ago. In this case, the association with urban values and a dysfunctional farm economy combined with an emerging feminist consciousness, to create the conditions for some perceived need for reforms on the family farm. These nuclear and extended family reforms, however, did not translate to religious community reforms. While the male church lay leaders did not ban divorced women from the church, they did ban them from teaching Sunday school. While the church leaders saw no reason to recognize the women's demands for change, most of the men gradually did. Over the next decade, many of the men also began working off the farm and most have regrouped their operations away from male dominated farm management strategies toward nuclear family economic strategies that place the preservation of the farm family at a higher priority than the preservation of the family farm.

Case 3: Old Order Amish

The comparisons of the Lutheran and the Brethren communities provides categories of analysis that are instructive in understanding the Amish and hence the role of religious reform in rural America. The Lutherans sensed a need to save the rural church community to protect their farm family and family farm values and ways of life. They saw the threat as external and they drew the line on external power influences. The Brethren focused on saving the family farm to save the farm family and the church community. They did not see the threat and as a result, the line was drawn for them. The Amish avoid the threats that eroded the Lutheran and Brethren communities by drawing the line on external hierarchical and urban influences five hundred years ago. They maintain local autonomy over their church leadership, which remains highly sensitive to the needs of the local farm community. Local leadership does not make hierarchical decisions about how to meet or protect those needs.

Amish religious communities define quite rigid roles, responsibilities, and rules that maintain social solidarity. Each community is regulated by such, which is called the *Ordnung*. The *Ordnung* explains how religion functions during times of change and existential threats. It does not spell out specific procedures, strategies, or tactics, however. They vary by each community in time and place. The function of the *Ordnung* is to draw the line on threats to community existence in terms of external categories of meaning, such as the material and social threats identified in the study of the Lutheran and Brethren communities. The *Ordnung*, however, draws its credibility not from church by-laws, community traditions, and social solidarity, but from the Bible. While the Amish clearly modify their economic behaviors and strategies in response to change or threats to their existence, those changes emerge after community discussions and consensus of what draws them away from God. While they value their families, their farming communities, and their separate way of life, their religion is not a means to those ends. What they ultimately seek to secure are their souls. Their families, their farming communities, and their religious expressions all serve to secure a way of life that has them living more in the kingdom of God than in the kingdom of the world.

Economic reforms in the Amish community can be made to expand economic options in response to changes in the agricultural economy, but if those reforms do not secure a long-term future for the group, they will continue to erode the integrity of the group's values and its solidarity. This erosion of their soils also threatens their souls, i.e., their relationship with God. So, how do the Amish decide what to change and what not to change? All three of the communities in this study were keenly aware that maintaining their religious values and

practices in community life was central to the survival of their communities, their farming enterprises, and their families. But only the Amish saw their religious communities as central to their personal salvation. Each community was threatened by the same external forces and influences of power: the American farm policy, global agricultural markets, and urban value encroachment. Farm community life was increasingly rationalized by bureaucratic efficiency and capitalist profit seeking. These forces eroded individual decision-making, household strategies, family stability, local economic viability, and the health and productivity of the soil, all in the name of efficiency and profits. Karl Marx told us that profits can be exploitative, and Max Weber told us that bureaucratic efficiency can be devoid of meaning. The Lutheran and Brethren communities knew this, but they did not draw a clear line on engagement in mainstream processes of participation until they were drawn for them and they were marginalized in the process. The Amish marginalize themselves first and draw a clear line between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God.

My time with the Amish taught me that they are not so much concerned about the erosion of the soil in terms of their ability to make a living at farming. They prefer to farm and be stewards of the soil, to be sure, but they work at other trades when farming opportunities are too few to keep them all together in a rural community. They are more interested in resisting the erosion of their souls, which is to them a separation from God. The *Ordnung* is designed to keep this from happening by defining the rules for engagement with the outside world and with each other. They must depend on each other, not outsiders. They must resist outside influences that erode their family and community solidarity and autonomy in economic strategies as a religious obligation. In this sense, they are radically different from the Lutheran and Brethren farming communities. Their focus on religion first, and the *Ordnung*, gives them a structure for resisting erosion of the soil and the soul. The *Ordnung* is more powerful than a Lutheran creed or a Brethren corporation in securing solidarity and salvation for family farmers. It enables the Amish to engage in religious resistance to erosion of the soil and the soul in ways that Lutherans and Brethren cannot obtain.

The focus on respect for individual discernment and autonomy provides another interesting comparison among the three groups in this study. Interestingly, individuality is not suppressed by the *Ordnung* in Amish communities, in fact, it is highly valued. Individuality, however, is defined and celebrated in terms of the gifts that individuals bring to the community, not to self-seeking gain. There is great individuality in terms of expressions of love and respect for others in the ways individuals develop and contribute creative niches in the local economy. Over the years of studying the Amish, I have come to see that one of reasons why the Amish community life thrives amid external threats to rural economies is due to the economic diversity and interdependency of highly adaptive individual participants whose contributions are valued in terms of spiritual gifts.

As a church doctrine, the *Ordnung* is not an abstract statement of belief or creed that survives diversity across time and space. It is the practical application of biblical scriptures in concrete and changing circumstances. The Amish do not draw on the Bible to define only what they believe, but also to define how they will live. The *Ordnung* is an agreement in basic principles of living in humility and loving a concrete community. Amish individuals humbly submit individual pride and arrogance for the good of the community and the love of others in alignment with the practices of Christ. Violation of the *Ordnung* may result in expulsion

from the community, but it is not devised for that purpose. Rather it is devised to help people live more Godly lives in orderly and predictable ways. The Amish tell me that compared to the way the outside world lives, they find it comforting. It gives them security to know what is expected not only from them, but what they can expect from others. In the community, they know they will be treated with love and respect.

While the Amish often do change the rules of the *Ordnung* to fit the circumstances of a changing world in concrete community contexts, they do not think they reform their religion which is based on the religious principles of love and humility. Those principles are inviolable. They can even move from one community to the other based on variations in *Ordnungs*. And they can return if they chose to do so. But in each community, they must submit themselves to the rules of that specific *Ordnung*. Reform does exist for them, but as an individual act of repentance of any activities that threaten the community. To participate fully in their religious community life, they repent regularly as they forgive each other. They draw these practices for defining and disciplining their behaviors directly from the Bible. According to the bishop, “that takes care of it.”

The *Ordnung* explains much about how the Amish have managed to sustain family farming community life despite so many external threats to them. It is the *Ordnung* that defines the rules for limiting the use of technological innovations of the sort that would reduce meaningful labor and separate them from each other. Restricting the investments in technology reduces their economic risks but is also serves to make them more innovative and efficient in other ways that develop individual talents and local entrepreneurial opportunities. During the 1980s and 1990s, when other farmers were taking on huge debts to expand their operations, the Amish were scaling down on agriculture to reduce risks and diversifying into development of small cottage businesses based on traditional craftsman skills that many of their English neighbors had abandoned. Due to the lack of available farmland, many young men also hired out as day laborer carpenters and construction workers.

Interestingly, now, in the twenty-first century, young Amish families are establishing highly productive local organic fruit and vegetable farm operations, providing fresh produce to major grocery chains in the wider surrounding area. They initially engaged in this strategy to provide opportunities for their children to learn farm labor and entrepreneurial skills to reproduce their cultural identities and agricultural way of life. The large demand for these products also provides young Amish men, who had been working off the farm in carpenter and construction trades, the economic means to work in farm family units again. This is what they prefer to do because it also brings the entire community together. The produce operations are so successful in the community under study that the members built a large produce auction facility in which they sell their produce. They also invite other non-Amish organic fruit and vegetable producers to bring their goods to the auction. This helps them understand market prices and participate in the larger rural economy more effectively and profitably. It is important to note here that profit is a necessary condition of their participation, but it is not sufficient motivation. The Amish desire first to farm and live in a farming community, not because it is highly profitable or that their farming way of life is their salvation. They will do other kinds of off-farm work if necessary, but only under the conditions that they can work together and avoid outside influences. Farming is desired because it is the best way they feel they can create an environment where they can teach their children the religious values of

loving work, living in harmony and love with others, and respect and care for God's creation. The rural family farming community is where they best experience the kingdom of God. Their strong family values, good marriages, and moral consciences are not objects of personal pride or religious piety, but outcomes of their love for God.

And while the Amish greatly reformed their relationships with outsiders over the last fifty years to expand their local economic strategies with their non-Amish neighbors, they retain a clear separation in social and recreational activities. Their children continue to attend separate country schools and they remain exempt from government programs such as health care or social security that would erode their obligations to care for each other. Their churches are locally led by individuals who "draw straws" for the assignments of pastors, deacons, and bishops. Compared to their Lutheran and Brethren neighbors, Amish worship practices evidence the least amount of change. They still hold church in their homes on rotation and sit on hard benches for three hours. I have participated in these worship events. A sermon lasts one full hour. Hymns can also each last one entire hour. As they did 500 years ago, the Amish sing slowly, placing 6-8 notes on each syllable of each word in their hymns. They remember and honor the persecuted martyrs who sang this way so that there would be no mistaking their singing for dance music as their jailors engaged in revelry to mock them.

The Amish maintain this sense of separatism to condition the community to not erode their ability to draw distinct lines on outside influences. While they engage with outsiders in a friendly manner, they monitor external threats closely. There is an important distinction that needs to be made here. Unlike their Lutheran and Brethren neighbors, the Amish define threats as spiritual, not just social, cultural, and economic. This religious resistance to erosion of the soil and the soul is a highly effective strategy, however, in addressing social, cultural, and economic threats. Because the Bible tells them that they must work by the sweat of their brows, they always have work. Their willingness to engage in manual labor provides opportunities to participate in local entrepreneurial economic activities that require them to depend on each other. Even when working off-farm jobs, they avoid working with non-Amish men or women because of the temptations to engage in morally eroding behaviors. They also avoid social and economic interactions and activities that would cause greed or pride. In this very real sense, their threats are moral and spiritual, not economic.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the idea of reform needs to be critiqued for usefulness as an objective construct that allows for broad generalizations. As a subjectively "worldly" concept for the Amish, it does little to explain what they are doing when they make changes in their *Ordnung* to sustain moral order, social solidarity, and economic stability in resistance to external threats. It also does little to explain what happened in the Brethren community when the male church leaders chose to restrict divorced women from church leadership roles but to take women more seriously in economic partnerships in their households. It also does little to explain what happened in the Lutheran community when the church council won a law suit against the local bishop allowing them out of an employment contract with an unsatisfactory pastor. In each case, religious resistance to erosion of the soil and the soul in local communities does not result in any larger religious structure reform movements.

In this study, each local religious community is not just an extension of a larger objective structure. Each is a highly subjective site of resistance to external threats. But compared to the Lutheran and Brethren communities, the Amish see threats very differently. The Brethren and the Lutherans are committed to living in a family and faith-centered community that is sustained by their farming and religious way of life. But these institutions are “in the world.” In stark contrast, the Amish are committed to “living in the kingdom of God.” The Ordnung allows the Amish to draw a clear line between the things of “this world” and the “kingdom of God.” It took me twenty years to fully understand it because I was working with objective analytic concepts drawn from “this world.” It is really very simple to the Amish. Instead of giving long detailed theological, sociological, anthropological, or economic explanations of what they are doing, they point to Bible verses. Matthew 6:33-34 sums up the Ordnung. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Yet, I need to explain how that works in this world, where the Amish clearly also live, as they readily acknowledge. To explain this tension between two competing worlds, I submit that the Amish hold a “double consciousness.” W. E. B. DuBois posited this theory of both the ideology and the behavior of oppressed groups in relation to oppressors. This study offers a modification of that concept. The “oppressors” in this case are not so much a race or class in power, but a dominant worldly culture. Following DuBois’ theory, the identities of the Amish are constructed in opposition to spiritual threats, not specific groups of people in power. Due to the “double consciousness” of their lives in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, the Amish have a second sight that privileges them to a unique perspective. This “second sight” is theorized by DuBois to explain a kind of power held by minorities. But DuBois is still identifying a worldly concept for worldly contexts. The Amish do not see their second sight in terms of fighting back or resisting a race, ethnic, or class power in this world, but rather in terms of a line they draw on themselves to avoid the influences of all things of this world that would separate them from the love of God and love of each other. And thus, they have no use for religious reforms that redraw the line between this world and the kingdom of God. That line is drawn for them in the Bible and it is inspired by God’s love. It is love that inspires the Ordnung, not objective analytic constructs like social solidarity, economic stability, and political agency.

The doctrine of love is a difficult one for social scientists to operationalize. It seems also to be difficult for Christians living in “this world.” D. A. Carson writes in *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* that American Protestantism has “sanitized, democratized, and sentimentalized” (12, 14) God’s love. Carson goes on to say that these over simplifications of God’s love miss the fullness of its applications in Christian circles (16). In the absence of a religious hierarchy of learned theologians, the Amish seek to apply the fundamental biblical insights of Christian love to their communities in faithful recognition of God’s sovereignty and their security in “the kingdom of God.”

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