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## Religion and the Visual

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### Religion on Parade

#### Religiously Themed Entries in Small-Town Parades

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#### Introduction

[1] With the exception of the years during World War II, thousands of people have flocked to the small northwest Iowa town of Orange City to celebrate Tulip Festival on the third weekend in May since 1936 (Orange City Tulip Festival 2010). The annual celebration of Dutch American culture features the coronation of the city's Tulip Queen and her court, a *StraatMarket* complete with traditional Dutch food and children's activities, a quilt show, performances of traditional Dutch songs by The Dutch Dozen, and for the teenagers, a recently added "Vande Fear" modeled after the television show, *Fear Factor*. While all of the events and activities draw a crowd, the highlights of Tulip Festival are the parades held twice daily on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Each parade begins with the *burgemeester* declaring that the street is too dirty and in no condition for the queen. What follows is a gendered enterprise of men and older boys in 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch garb pouring water out of five-gallon

buckets onto the street followed by women, girls, and pre-school aged boys with push brooms who sweep the streets clean of any debris. With the streets now clean, the assembled crowd rises to its feet as American military veterans officially start the parade by presenting the American colors. Following the colors are a grand marshal, various political figures, several marching bands, including the “Pride of the Dutch” Marching Band from the local Maurice–Orange City–Floyd Valley community school outfitted in purple shirts, black pants, and white wooden shoes, and, of course, the queen and her court. Many of the entries highlight various aspects of Dutch and Dutch American culture, at least as the community collectively remembers them existing in the 1800s.



Figure 1. Orange City Tulip Festival, *De Kerk*, 2010.

[2] What is unmistakable to the audience is the overtly religious aspect of many of the parade entries, which comes as no surprise to most in attendance since Orange City, and the surrounding Sioux County, have reputations for high levels of religiosity; 96.5% of the county’s residents were members of its 67 religious congregations, all of which are Christian, in 2000 (Jones et al.). The area is also known for blending religion and conservative politics; 86% of the county voters cast their votes for Bush in 2004, and 81% voted for McCain in 2008 (CNN; *USA Today*). Many floats and other entries are adorned with Bible verses, but without a doubt, the religious centerpiece of the Tulip Festival’s parade is *De Kerk*, a brown, aniconic float with children in the role of the congregation, a pastor, pews, a pulpit, and a hymn board (see Figure 1). As *De Kerk* made its way through the streets of Orange City in 2010, public address announcers read the following:

“The Church.” In the early 1600s many Dutch began immigrating to the New World (what is now the United States). To many of the immigrants, their faith played the most prominent role in their lives. Thus it was not long

until they established the Dutch Reformed Church in their new homeland. Later this became the Reformed Church in America, the oldest Protestant denomination in the U.S. with a continuous history. The founders were careful to make the distinction that their denomination was the Reformed Church IN America, not OF America – to them a very important statement that their church was not a national church as it was in the Netherlands.

In the second half of the 19th century this denomination divided into two – the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church in America. Seven churches in Orange City have their roots in this Dutch Reformed Church. Northwestern College is affiliated with the Reformed Church in America; Dordt College in nearby Sioux Center is affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Thanks to Mulder Used Cars for the providing the vehicle.

[3] Colleen McDannell argues that “[r]eligious objects frequently serve as the material reminders of significant events, people, moods, and activities by condensing and compressing memory” (39). *De Kerke* provides a wonderful example of this point. In one parade float, the organizers of the Tulip Festival parades inform the thousands of people in attendance about their community’s religious heritage and their ancestors’ commitment to their faith and religious freedom. Several hundred years of religious history are compressed into one visual image, which glosses over the strife that lead to the RCA/CRC schism and the rivalry between the two area colleges. It represents the community’s religious composition of today. *De Kerke* serves some of the very functions McDannell assigns to religious artifacts; it helps “Christians to acknowledge common commitments, delineate differences, express affection, (and) socialize children” (57).

[4] Perhaps what is most unique about *De Kerke* and the history lesson that accompanies it is that the float is owned and maintained by the city itself, not by any local church. Parade organizers recruit various pastors from the community to ride on it, and each parade includes a different pastor; being a pastor in the Reformed Church in America or the Christian Reformed Church is not a requirement. The remainder of the religiously themed entries are owned and organized by local churches or other organizations, but *De Kerke* has a permanence and communal quality that rises above the everyday existence of congregational life. The float is a tangible, visual symbol of all that the church is for Orange City.

[5] This paper is an exploration of *De Kerke* and other religiously themed entries in small-town parades in six Iowa and Nebraska communities. In the pages that follow I place the religiously themed entries in the larger context of the parades, accompanying community festivals, and the towns that host them. I argue that the parades serve as a means for each community to create and re-create an identity that connects their pasts to their presents, and that the inclusion of religiously themed entries helps to add a Christian element to their identities. Beyond identity creation, however, I draw on Sack’s (1983) concept of territoriality and argue that the inclusion of such entries serve as a way for Christians to bring the sacred into the profane world of ordinary city streets and physically lay claim to their entire communities. While the Christian nature of the communities is not in doubt by most of their residents, annually parading representations of churches and other church-sponsored entries

down the towns' main streets serves as a reminder of the place Christianity has in these communities.

### **Methods**

[6] In 2010 and 2011, I attended the parades held in conjunction with local celebrations in six communities in Iowa (Jefferson's Bell Tower Festival, Orange City's Tulip Festival, and Elk Horn's Tivoli Fest) and Nebraska (O'Neill's St. Patrick's Celebration, Ponca's Days of '56 Rodeo, and Wilber's Czech Festival). These locations were selected because of their proximity to my academic institution – all are within a four hour drive of my campus – and because of the size of the community in which the festivals took place. According to the United States Census Bureau's 2009 population estimates, Orange City is the largest of these communities with a population of 5,814, followed by Jefferson (4,117) and O'Neill (3,249). Wilber (1,747), Ponca (1,084), and Elk Horn (607) lag behind the larger three. This is a study of how religion, specifically Christianity, is portrayed in parades in small, mostly homogeneous communities, where parades are not run by professionals but by volunteers, and where most people know most of their neighbors and co-residents. The parades are not entirely meant to entertain community residents themselves, although this clearly happens, but to attract outsiders and their money to the community for the day. Additionally, four of the festivals are related to white ethnicity (Dutch, Irish, Czech, and Danish American) while two are not; the goal of including both types of festivals is to make comparisons about the types of identity issues played out in both kinds of settings.

[7] I digitally recorded each parade, took still photographs, and conducted informal interviews with numerous people who were present at the festivals (including people who helped construct and rode on the floats, organized the parades, participated in the parades behind the scenes, and were spectators) while taking field notes. In addition to attending the 2010 and 2011 festivals, I attended the Wilber Czech Festival on one other occasion, the Orange City Tulip Festival on three other occasions, and the Jefferson Bell Tower Festival eight times over the past fifteen years. I do not reference these earlier visits in this study, but watching parades, participating in festivals, and talking with community residents in previous years has helped shape some of the conclusions I present in the coming pages.

### **Territoriality, the Visual, and Religion on Parade**

[8] Robert Sack (1983) argues that people can attempt to affect, influence, or control other people's behavior either through non-territorial or territorial means. Colleges, for example, could attempt to control their students' use of alcohol in either way. Non-territorially, a college could sponsor a series of programs about binge drinking and alcohol abuse and their consequences, put posters up on campus encouraging responsible drinking or abstinence from it, and/or plan social activities for nights when students might otherwise drink, all in an effort to prevent students from drinking too much alcohol. Territorially, a college could make its campus officially dry and punish any student who violated the policy. The territory of the campus is thus used to influence the behavior of the student body. Sack (1983) argues that territoriality is often supported by non-territorial claims about the appropriateness of particular behaviors in particular places, but ultimately, he argues that territoriality is more effective than non-territoriality at influencing behavior and allowing some people access to

certain resources while denying access to others. Indeed, without the ability to regulate place, most attempts a group makes to exert power will probably be ineffective (Herbert 1997; Sack 1993).

[9] Sack defines territoriality as “the attempt by an individual or group (x) to influence, affect, or control objects, people, and relationships (y) by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” (1983: 56). People are able to influence and control others through the use of place because places themselves are socially constructed phenomena; as Cresswell states, “places are being made, maintained and contested” all the time (5). Places are greater than simply their physical location and locale, they also possess a “sense of place,” which Agnew defines as “the local ‘structure of feeling’” through which institutions “form nodes around which human activities circulate . . . social relations are located and with which people can identify”(28). Being able to determine what the predominately held sense of place is for a given place, as well as to define which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate for the place, allows groups to exert power over other groups. As Sack states, “(t)erritorial rules about what is in or out of place pervade and structure lives”; they make it possible to enforce other rules of behavior and mold groups to meet the desired end of social elites (1993: 327).

[10] All of the senses can be used to employ territoriality and establish a sense of place in an effort to influence behavior, but of particular importance for this paper is the use of visual culture and material artifacts to send signals about the nature of a place. Material goods and visual culture play an important role in the creation, maintenance, and contestation of place; indeed, they make up some of a place’s locale (Agnew; Cresswell). Signage, for example, is used as a visual tool by people in official positions of authority to mark city boundaries, name streets or neighborhoods, and indicate who is and who is not welcome in a particular room (i.e., women’s and men’s locker rooms). Other visual means, like gang graffiti (Ley and Cybriwsky; Alonso), are used to make territorial claims as well by people who may not have the legitimate authority to claim a territory as their own. Many of these visual indicators about who is welcome in certain places and what behaviors will or will not be accepted are much more subtle and may go unnoticed or unrecognized by the dominant group. Indeed, many visual clues may simply be interpreted by members of the dominant group as simply normal or natural, similar to the ways in which the nature of whiteness and white privilege often go unrecognized by whites in the United States (cf. McIntosh; Bonilla-Silva).

[11] The territorial use of objects is central to the connection that exists between place, identity, and physical objects. O’Reilly and Crutcher (248) argue that “(t)erritoriality and identity are fused” and cannot be separated, and given the important role of physical objects in visually marking territory, I argue that physical objects are often joined in the fusion of territoriality and identity to solidify the relationship between the two. Thus, understanding the relationship between a people’s identity, their physical objects, and their territory is crucial to understanding the power dynamics that exist in a community and efforts to create a commonly held community identity. Things are important, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton note: “(t)hings contribute to the cultivation of the self when they help create order in consciousness at the levels of the person, community, and patterns of natural order . . . (T)he material environment that surrounds us is rarely neutral; it either helps the forces of chaos that make life random and disorganized or it helps to give purpose and

direction to one's life"(16-17). While Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton comment on the role of material objects in the development of the self, I argue that things help communities create order out of potential chaos, establish a community identity, and in much the same way that territoriality makes claims about who is in and out of a group and what behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate, so too can physical objects. Physical objects greatly aid the process of territoriality by providing visual cues about territorial control and presence.

[12] Colleen McDannell has done much to advance the idea that physical objects and the visual are used by Christian groups, in particular, to send signals to their co-religionists as well as outsiders about their identity as Christians. She argues,

Christians use religious goods to tell themselves and the world around them that they are Christians. . . . Religious objects also signal who is in the group and who is not. They teach people how to think and act like Christians. They are used to lure, encourage, and shock non-Christians into considering the truth of Christianity. The social exchange of religious goods can strengthen friendships as well as provide financial support for churches and church organizations. Religious goods not only bind people to the sacred, they bind people to each other (45).

[13] As such, the presence of religious goods helps to create community by binding people together – they are things around which people can worship, remember those who have died, and reaffirm the connections that people have to each other. Indeed, “[w]hen objects function as a symbol of community affiliation, they do so in a fairly direct way” (McDannell: 48). Crosses on steeples overlooking a small town, crucifixes in classrooms, and statuary in courtyards all serve to claim a certain place for the group that has led to their installation. Parade floats can also visually reinforce or solidify the role of the church in a community by temporarily moving its presence beyond the physical building normally associated with it into the contested world of the street.

[14] Previous research has argued that parades serve “as a method of self-expression and self-definition, as well as a method of representation of the self to society as a whole” (Davis: 297) and give groups the opportunity to present “a positive community identity” (O’Reilly and Crutcher: 252) of themselves to an audience in a way that links that identity to the place in which they are parading. Parades are a way to build public support for the parading group (McNamara) and send the message to both parade participants and the audience about who is and who is not an accepted part of the group on parade (Mulligan). I argue, however, that parades do more than present an identity to an audience and attempt to build support for those parading. They also provide a unique opportunity for studying the relationship between territoriality, identity, and material objects because they are rather ephemeral events, but ones that typically occur on a regular basis. They do not provide a permanent visual reminder of who controls or is accepted as part of a nation (cf. Blehr; Hung), community, or neighborhood, as a building or sign would, but for a brief period of time, they do provide visual clues about who controls the place and what their ideal version of that place should look like. As O’Reilly and Crutcher argue in their study of parading in New Orleans, “parade participants, by performing a visual spectacle on New Orleans’

streets, make claims to those public spaces as their own. Bodies in motion, taking up space, 'enact the streets' as though they belong to those parading." (251). In the process, parade participants not only "advertise their presence and demonstrate their solidarity" (McNamara: 102) but territorialize the neighborhoods along the route through their "temporary, but explicit, physical presence" (O'Reilly and Crutcher: 258). That parades often occur annually provides a recurring ritual tradition that reinforces the territorial claims. I argue that the parades in each of the six communities under examination help to create and re-create a positive community identity for each of the towns, and the inclusion of religiously themed entries by churches, parachurch organizations, and others visually solidifies the place of Christianity in the communities' identities alongside other important institutions and values like patriotism, a commitment to agriculture, education, small businesses, and volunteerism.

### **The Parades**

[15] The parades in each of the six communities are not the elaborate affairs that famous parades, such as Pasadena's Rose Bowl Parade or New York City's Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, are. Instead, they are modest events in which members of the communities and the surrounding area decorate their cars, trucks, tractors, hay racks, and other farm implements in a common theme, are joined by area politicians (particularly in election years), police, firefighters, ambulance crews, horseback riders, and the local high school marching band, and march down the main street of the communities in front of their neighbors, friends, family members, and any tourists who have come to town to see the event. They are organized by local volunteers who meet on their own time to make all of the necessary preparations for the parades to run smoothly. Despite their largely volunteer nature and reliance upon community members, the parades clearly reflect and create a particular image of the community to participants and spectators alike and have the support of the powers that be in each community. In fact, each of the parades reveals the power structure of the communities in subtle ways, highlighting the various levels at which power operates. O'Reilly and Crutcher (248) note, "As spatialized methods of communication performed on the streets, parades can be expressions of any number of scaled power relations. They may be communications of state or elite power, or seek to convey a subversive message." In these parades, the official sanction of the area elites were felt, but subversive messages were not; these parades largely maintain and support the power of the nation, state, and especially local elites both politically, culturally, and religiously.

[16] It was evident from the beginning of nearly every parade that they have the official permission of the community to hold the event because all of the parades are lead by local law enforcement vehicles. Even the Orange City Tulip Festival parades that are prefaced with street scrubbing are lead by a color guard once the streets are deemed appropriately cleaned. Furthermore, all of the parades include fire trucks and ambulances from the local communities, giving each parade the feeling of official approval. While an overt military presence was not found in all of the parades, area National Guard units and veterans' groups participated in several of the parades adding a patriotic and nationalistic feeling to the events. Local and national politicians, and in a few cases even international delegates marched or rode in convertibles in all of the parades, often receiving warm welcomes from the crowds. The parades, however, are about more than simply reinforcing patriotism or a commitment

to the political powers that run the nation, state, county, or town; they also reinforce the dominant economic and cultural facets of community life. All of the parades included tractors, and in a couple of cases, nearly one hundred assorted farm implements made their way down the parade route highlighting the important economic and culture roles of agricultural life in the communities. Local businesses often sponsored floats or other entries with their owners and employees typically throwing candy, plastic piggy banks, Frisbees, or small toys to the children along the route. Several of the communities hosted class reunions during the town festival and many of the people celebrating their tenth, twentieth, or fiftieth class reunion, to name but a few, rode on semi trailers or hay racks in the parades. The personal relationships that are valued by so many small town residents were also on display as it was acceptable behavior in all of the parades for people in the crowd to run out onto the route to greet someone in the parade that they had not seen in a while, and several entries even stopped during the parades to allow the drivers or riders to chit chat with the crowd. The presence of church- or parachurch-sponsored entries in the parade did not stand out as anything unusual or exceptional; they were simply representations of another important community institution in the parade.



Figure 2: Wilber Czech Festival, Flags, 2010.

[17] The fusion of territory and identity can be seen in all of the parades, but it is most obvious in the parades that accompany white ethnic festivals, particularly the three larger ones: Wilber's Czech Festival, O'Neill's St. Patrick's Day Celebration, and Orange City's Tulip Festival. At the Wilber Czech Festival, for example, very early in the parade men in traditional Czech costumes marched two flags down the street: the American flag and the Papal flag (Figure 2). The procession of both flags serves to reinforce the historical connection between Czech ethnicity and Catholicism in the community, although a small number of people at the festival reminded me that Czechs also have a long Free Thinker tradition. Furthermore, knowing the meaning of the Papal flag is a symbol of insider status

as many of the visitors with whom I spoke were unaware of the flag's political and religious meaning. A more visible reminder of the Catholic nature of the community, and one that more visitors, especially non-Catholics, would identify as Catholic was the presence of the Knights of Columbus (Figure 3). One entry, a simple wooden cross erected on a small trailer and pulled by a John Deere Gator, fused patriotism and religion while advertising a fundraising breakfast for the following morning. These were the only religiously based entries in the entire parade and served as subtle reminders of the Catholic nature of the Czech enclave.



Figure 3. Wilber Czech Festival, Knights of Columbus, 2010.

[18] O'Neill's St. Patrick's Day Celebration parade reinforced the connection between religion and ethnic identity through the inclusion of a Knights of Columbus entry (Figure 4). Located amidst horses and dogs that had been dyed green for the festivities, off-road vehicles, and dozens of green John Deere tractors, the Knights of Columbus entry was pulled by a pick-up truck and primarily served the function of reminding parade-goers that the Knights were active in the community and sponsored events like a free throw shooting contest and Tootsie Roll Sunday. As in Wilber's Czech Festival parade, no other religiously themed entries were present in O'Neill's parade, although a handful of entries did sport Bible verses. As in Wilber, the presence of O'Neill's Knights of Columbus entry was a public reminder of the connection between the community's dominant ethnic group's identity and religion through its use of the territory of the street.



Figure 4. O'Neill St. Patrick's Day Celebration, Knights of Columbus, 2011.



Figure 5. Orange City Tulip Festival, First Reformed Church, 2010.

[19] Nowhere was the connection between religion and ethnic identity drawn as directly as it was in Orange City's Tulip Festival parades. In addition to *De Kerke*, the float discussed in the introduction, a number of entries in the parades highlighted the connection between Dutch American ethnicity and Reformed Christianity. The "float builders" of First Reformed Church, as they were described over the loud speaker during the parades, were responsible for making the float seen in Figure 5. Adorned by tulips, large wooden shoes, and both adults and children in 1800s Dutch-style clothing, the float appeared in all of the festival's parades in 2010 and helped remind spectators of the Christian nature of the community through the use of the reference to Second Corinthians. Several members of the church stated that building floats is a part of their church's mission of evangelism, although most tended to downplay the evangelism aspect of the entry. "We're First Reformed and yeah, yeah, yeah," said Irene, a middle-aged woman who helped build and ride on the float, with a sly grin on her face when pressed on the issue. Similarly, the entry from Middleburg Reformed Church (Figure 6) reminded the audience that the church, located on a rural road several miles outside of town, existed and was available as an attendance option on Sunday mornings. Even though the church is not physically located in the city limits, the entry showed that the church and its members are welcomed participants in the community's life.



Figure 6. Orange City Tulip Festival, Middleburg Free Grace Reformed Church, 2010.

[20] Among the communities in the study, Orange City was also unique in that it allowed an outside group, the Christian Motorcyclists Association (Figure 7), to participate in their parades. CMA is an evangelical organization based in Hatfield, Arkansas, and has branches in every state, including 19 in Iowa. Members organize and participate in various rallies, runs, and parades across the country in an effort to convert motorcycle enthusiasts and others to the group's evangelical form of Protestantism. Orange City does not have a local chapter of the CMA, but the inclusion of this group is a public declaration that the community, known regionally for its conservative Christianity and politics, is an accepting place for evangelical

Christian groups, even if they are not part of the community proper. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the form of Christianity practiced by most community members is broad enough to break down conventional stereotypes about the religion – church is not only for people who wear suits and ankle-length dresses, but for bikers, too. The presence of the CMA breaks the overall Dutch ethnic theme of the parade and town festival, but it does so for an evangelical purpose.



Figure 7. Orange City Tulip Festival, Christian Motorcyclists Association, 2010.

[21] Not surprisingly, the Elk Horn Lutheran Church had the first religiously themed entry in the Elk Horn Tivoli Fest parade (Figure 8), again highlighting the connection between ethnic identity and religion. What was somewhat unusual about the entry was that it had no overt connection between the Danish identity of the festival and the church in terms of its theme, although many of the parade entries did not play heavily on the Danish theme. Instead, the entry's designers used an outer space motif to highlight their vacation Bible School theme, a move clearly intended to advertise their summer program to the community at large. In addition to the Lutheran Church, the First Baptist Church of Elk Horn also had an entry in the 2011 parade (Figure 9), but their entry was very simple: banners with the values of the church standing upright in the back of a pick-up truck. While these entries did not play up the Danish heritage of the community and the festival, they did fit in very nicely with many of the other entries. Most of the signage on the entries was handwritten, both were connected to the rural identity of the community, and the drivers and other parade participants interacted frequently with the audience. Furthermore, given that very few of the parade entries drew on the Danish theme of Tivoli Fest, they did not stand out from the other entries. Like the religious entries in the other parades in this study, their presence alongside other community institutions was most important.



Figure 8. Elk Horn Tivoli Fest, Elk Horn Lutheran Church, 2011.



Figure 9. Elk Horn Tivoli Fest, First Baptist Church, 2011.

[22] The parades that were not connected to an ethnic identity (Ponca's Days of '56 Rodeo parade and Jefferson's Bell Tower Festival parade) also melded religion and community identity. With no common ethnic identity to provide a common religious heritage for most community members or a theme for the parade, the entries in these parades were primarily about individual churches reminding the crowd of their presence in and the broader Christian nature of those communities. These entries tended to fit nicely into the overall theme of the parades, one that centered on a rodeo in Ponca's case or the celebration of community identity in Jefferson's. The entry made by Ponca's Salem Lutheran Church is a nice example of connecting the church's identity to that of the community (Figure 10). Pulled by a large farm pick-up truck, the entry featured hay bales and two girls on saddles riding on a flatbed trailer with the phrase "Saddle Up with Salem" painted on the back. The entry's creators played on the rodeo and small town themes that ran throughout the parade, and while the entry did not take an extraordinary amount of time to prepare, its quality was in line with most other entries. The Ponca Knights of Columbus entry (Figure 11) was similar to many other entries in the parade – two men with flags riding in the back of a pickup truck with a handmade sign identifying them as representatives of the Knights of Columbus.



Figure 10. Ponca Days of '56 Rodeo Parade, Salem Lutheran Church, 2010.

[23] More important than the actual design of the entries is their inclusion in the parade. These entries paraded down the town's main street along with the school's state championship winning football team, its fire trucks and police cars, local horseback riders, and dozens of tractors and other farm implements. Even though there was no connection to an ethnic identity, the Ponca Days of '56 Rodeo parade was very much about community identity – one that is unashamedly rural. The inclusion of the religious groups in the parade

helped to territorially solidify the Christian nature of the community, although what type of Christian an individual is does not seem to matter.



Figure 11. Ponca Days of '56 Rodeo Parade, Knights of Columbus, 2010.

[24] Similarly, the Jefferson Bell Tower Festival is a celebration of community identity. Jefferson's parade attracts representatives from nearly all of the communities in the rest of Greene County, Iowa. Essentially all of the police, volunteer fire departments, and ambulances from the county converge on Jefferson for the parade, all demonstrating that their communities, while very small (most fewer than 1,000 residents), still maintain such services, which is a sign of vitality for many small towns in the Midwest. Several residents with whom I spoke joked that they hoped there were no fires or emergencies anywhere else in the county during the parade because there was no one left to help if there were. In addition to emergency vehicles, farmers and implement dealers from all over the county participate in the parade; dozens upon dozens of tractors stretched for city blocks on end. The presence of the emergency vehicles and farmers from all corners of the county serves to solidify Jefferson's position as the county seat and the most important town in the county by making it the central gathering point for county's largest summer celebration.

[25] A handful of entries from churches and parachurch organizations are sprinkled in the midst of Jefferson's parade. The Greenbrier Church entry (Figure 12), the most elaborate of these, features a replica of the church pulled by a pick-up truck. Like the Middleburg Reformed Church entry in Orange City, the Greenbrier Church is a rural church that uses the parade as a means for reminding the community that it is there and an option on Sunday mornings. The Greenbrier Church entry is a standard in the parade and has been present every time I have visited the parade over the past fifteen years. A growing evangelical church

often participates in the parade and selects a different theme each year (on one occasion the pastor and several members rollerbladed the parade route passing out treats), but did not participate in 2010, the most recent year I attended the Jefferson parade. Parachurch organizations in the community, like ARC, an interdenominational food pantry run by local churches, add some Christian elements to the parade through their presence and use Bible verses on their entries. Overall, like Ponca and the other communities studied here, the important element of the religiously themed entries in Jefferson is their presence, a reminder of the overall Christian composition of the city and county and of the connection between the religious life of the community and its economic and cultural institutions.



Figure 12. Jefferson Bell Tower Festival Parade, Greenbrier Church, 2010.

### Discussion and Conclusion

[26] Many of the previous studies of parades have dealt with fairly heavy social and political issues like the redefinition of an entire nation in the case of Mao Zedong's parades in 1950s China (Hung), the marginalized place of African American labor in New Orleans (O'Reilly and Crutcher), and the exclusion of and efforts to celebrate GLBT identity in parades in New York (Mulligan) or New Orleans (O'Reilly and Crutcher). The parades in the six communities I studied did not operate on this level, and indeed, could not have operated on this level. Although they did receive the support of the local political powers and included entries attesting to the communities' patriotism, they were not large nationalistic efforts like Mao's parades and because of the largely homogeneous nature of the communities (all are overwhelmingly white and at least nominally Christian), there is no need to parade to claim a particular neighborhood as one's own as it is done in large cities like New York or New Orleans. There are no sharp boundaries between Christian and Jewish, Irish and German, or

White and African American neighborhoods. Apart from a recent influx of a small number of Hispanic immigrants, the threats to community identity and the need to parade for the communities' dominant groups to claim or reclaim their communities as their own is absent. Each of the communities and their festivals examined here existed long before Hispanics began moving into the towns. So why have these parades? Is something going on here beyond simply providing entertainment and attracting some tourist dollars? And why do religiously themed entries show up in all six towns' parades?

[27] McDannell argues that “[r]eligious goods and landscapes can tell Christians that they belong to a particular community or family, but material culture can also be used symbolically to exclude the ‘unworthy’” (272), and I believe that this is done even when the “unworthy” or the excluded group is only imaginary or so small that it poses no real threat to the dominant group or the elites in a community. I argue that the inclusion of religiously themed entries like *De Kerk* and replicas of the Greenbrier Church in the parades in the six small towns reminds the people in attendance and those parading of the predominantly Christian identity of each community, even if virtually no one really questions it at the local level. As such, the parades become territorial claims concerning the ideal nature and identity of the communities themselves, even if the only people seeing and hearing the message are the participants in the parades, the town's residents, and the visitors from outside the community who, given the demographic and religious composition of the region, are racially, politically, culturally, and religiously similar to the participants (although the concentration of Reformed churches and the Dutch American population of Orange City does make it somewhat atypical in the region). By including religiously themed entries, particularly those created by churches, alongside tractors, fire trucks, businesses, and other community institutions creates a community identity and social order that physically and visually places religious institutions in the context of the larger community. Parades are territorial means by which these communities say they are proud to be rural and have economies based on agriculture, proud to have small businesses and public schools that are still open, proud to support and be served by police, volunteer fire departments, and ambulances, and proud to be Christian.

[28] I do not believe, however, that this territorial exercise is undertaken in a malicious way, and no one with whom I spoke made comments about intentionally trying to exclude Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, or members of any other minority religious groups. If anything, the efforts made on the part of the churches and parachurch organizations that participated in the parades would be to build commitment from their current members by having them publicly acknowledge their faith through their participation in the parade and to encourage the people in attendance who are nominally Christian and/or religiously unaffiliated that the church is a part of the community's identity. Those absent from the parade are the primary intended audience of the message about community identity; the parade participants are reminding their neighbors and friends who “we” are and who “we” are not in a territorial way. This is a power play on the part of the local elites and religious leaders, but I do not believe it is one aimed specifically at minority religious groups because they simply are not present in these communities.

[29] Orsi (33) notes that “the street is a text composed by the people, though their composition is shaped and constrained by the social and economic facts of their lives . . . (it

is a place where) the community revealed itself to itself and to others.” This is what the parades in Orange City, Wilber, O’Neill, Elk Horn, Ponca, and Jefferson do, but in addition to revealing some of what they are, they are also displaying what their leaders and most socially, politically, and religiously active citizens would ideally like them to be. Writing about Norway’s Constitution Day parades, Blehr (175) argues that the parades display a version of the “ideal” social order and character of the Scandinavian nation to its citizens. The parades in these small towns do the same thing. They territorially create an ideal version of the desired community identity and social order in a way that merges the political, cultural, economic, and religious institutions in their communities by literally parading these institutions down the main street of town. They show the participants and audience who is in the community and who is not and what the community values, even if most of the real “outsiders” are not really there and the values go largely unquestioned by anybody in attendance. The parades annually, ritualistically, and territorially re-create and reinforce ideal community identities based on rural living, small-scale businesses, locally controlled schools, volunteer services, and Christianity for each of these six small towns.

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