

The amidst the amish theology religion essay



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Thesis Statement

Many questions have been raised about this intransigent religious community. Strong faith and ardent adherence to three hundred year old traditions have awed and irritated, inspired and confused, but more importantly fascinated America for over a century. Why and how do the Amish continue to live in a separatist and communal culture that has thrived within in one of the most open, individualist societies on earth? Perhaps studying at the Amish culture will encourage us to look deeper into what fascinates us about their roots in deep American values. The Amish, so focused on living in the past in a world so focused on the future, have developed a close community that embraces a tradition over three hundred years old that truly puts the power in the community's hands to control and dictate their future. Body Paragraph#1- Topic Sentence #1

Old order Amish represent a cultural-religious movement of the early 16th century.

Supporting Evidence

In the mid 1800's, southeast Iowa attracted a unique religious group to its fertile agricultural soil as this group sought isolation, or sparsely populated areas, that had adequate economic possibilities. It is believed this started a reform movement within the Mennonite movement - an attempt to restore some of the traditional beliefs of the Mennonites.

Explanation

Jacob Ammann, an early leader of the group from where their name is derived, founded an Anabaptist church that instilled a negative view of the world. The beliefs of the Amish were based on the writings and founder of the Mennonite faith, Menno Simons, and on the 1632 Mennonite Dordrecht Confession of Faith. However, during the late 17th century, the Amish split from the Mennonites for what is believed to be an intolerance to their lack of discipline.

So What?

The old order Amish have kept their theology and culture preserved for what is believed to be how it was first established over three hundred years prior. The twenty-first century has not brought no large changes from outside influences such as other cultures. The old order Amish still worship today, the same they did over 100 years ago. Strict rules are still followed, such as a formal dress code at all times, and no use of modern modes of transportation, electricity, or phones. Body Paragraph#2 - Topic Sentence#2

The Old Order Amish continue, virtually unchanged, the cultural-religious traditions of their ancestors.

Supporting Evidence

The Old Order Amish believe in mutual aid, or general reciprocity, and assist each other in many ways, the most famous being the barn raisings.

However, in the same manner, they never practiced community of goods and still insist that members rely on farming as a source of wealth and goods to survive. Membership in the Old Order Amish Mennonite Church is still not freely available; however, studies have shown that member's total about one

hundred eighty thousands members spread across some twenty-two states, including over forty-five thousand in Ohio alone.

Explanation

The Old Order Amish are a very conservative Christian faith group with an Anabaptist tradition that can be compared closely to the practices of many Fundamentalist or Evangelical churches. The Amish also believe their church has been given the authority from God to interpret his will. " Submission to church is submission to God" (Rensberger, 2003). Furthermore, the Amish believe in remain segregated from the world both physically and socially as it is believed to be of a polluting nature like a disease and therefore have no desire to be on the national electric grid as they believe this would connect them too much to the outside world. Amish are also strongly against war and practice a nonresistance attitude that rejects involvement with the military or warfare and must never resort to violence. However, they do not consider themselves as pacifists, as this would involve engaging in political action to promote peace.

So What?

In part, the Amish tradition and believes may be due to the intense persecution that their ancestors endured as a result of government oppression. As a result, the Amish have adopted a congregational organization that is independent of each other. As each as their own leadership, there is no formal head of national office. Furthermore, like the majority of conservative Christian denominations, women are not allowed to hold positions of power and must subject themselves to a man's rule. Body Paragraph#3 - Topic Sentence#3

Practices shared by the Old Order Amish, the largest Amish group, are collectively firm in the foundation laid by the forefathers by holding true to the values set forth hundreds of years prior.

Supporting Evidence

The spoken language is a German Dialect called Pennsylvania Dutch.

Schools are single-room buildings that offer schooling up to grade level eight.

Any schooling thereafter is discouraged. Men follow the laws of the book of

Hebrews in regards to beards and refrain from growing mustaches as they

have a long association with military. Men dress in plain, dark colored suits

whilst women wear plain colored dresses with long sleeves, a bonnet, and an

apron. Vehicles, electrical devices and phones are still forbidden. The Amish

do not collect anything from the Government such as welfare,

unemployment, or Social Security, but rather have a mutual aid fund for

those in need of financial assistance. Photography of oneself is forbidden as

it has the potential to go against the word of God in the second

commandment that states, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven

image, or any likeness of anything that... is in the earth..." Marriage outside

the faith are not allowed, those who wish to be married are "published" in

late October and are wed in either November or early December. Religious

services are held bi-weekly on alternate Sundays. The Sundays in between

are spent either at another congregation, friends, or family. Communion

services are held twice a year in which any disagreements will be resolved

by a meeting of council members who also discuss matters regarding

lifestyle and conduct.

Explanation

Media has often given an uneven balance of the Amish culture and focuses more on those who have split away from the traditional ways of the Old Amish. However, for those who question whether or not they even have a choice of their own at any point, they do. What is known as rumspringa is the point in a young adults life (generally at the age of sixteen and older) when the strict rules governing the Amish lifestyle are released from the child. The child has yet to be baptized and therefore has not committed his or herself to the Amish culture yet and is therefore encouraged to experience outside traditions and amenities that otherwise would not be available. Therefore, it is acceptable to attend parties, drink alcoholic beverages, wear jeans, visit the outside world, etc. The intent is to make sure that these young people are giving their informed consent if they so choose to be baptized. According to statistics, eighty to ninety percent choose to remain Amish.

So What?

With so much the world has to offer, and with so much available at a wants desire, why do the Amish continue to live in a foraging society that relies on hard work, community, agriculture, and religion to survive. Furthermore, at some point, all members were given the choice to step out of the Amish culture and make a choice to take part in something else; An American culture that advertises the American dream, a national characteristic of the United States, a set of ideals in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success that has been instilled in the hearts of Americans as it is rooted in the Declaration of Independence as we are " endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights." Amongst those rights are " Life,

Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Yet despite the things promised by our ancestors, they find more comfort in their own community as they are supported by others without government conflicts, outside influences that could affect the culture or beliefs that are burned into the hearts of every baptized member who dedicates his or her life to living a life of purity in honor of God. The Amish have focused their hearts and goals on a lifestyle that focuses not in the best interest of just themselves, but the best interest of the community and through that community has brought a group of people closer than most families here in America that are willing to help in any way they can; whether that be small services such as lending a hand for an elderly lady to cross the street, or gathering the community as a whole to resurrect a new barn. The Amish, unlike our American culture, have instilled a sense of pride amongst the community as a whole, and when one hurts they all hurt, but at the same time when one rejoices the community rejoices and with that comes a respect for a foraging culture that puts family, friends, and God at the center of their lives and the self-centered ways of so many other cultures, admittedly even our own, that encourages taking all the necessary steps needed to gain independent wealth and recognition even if that means stepping on the heads of other to get there.

Conclusion

The Amish, although a foraging community that focuses on keeping traditional core values, have grown into a large community of culture-religious members who are dedicated to what they believe in. Americans may be awed, confused, and even astounded by some of the sacrifices that the Amish are willing to take to ensure that those core beliefs are not affected or altered in any way. Furthermore, unlike other cultures, even our own, their values have remained the same, and for many centuries. Perhaps the sacrifices made are not really sacrifices at all but instead a choice that has been given only one scenario that works. That choice is a choice of dedication to whole-heartedly commit your soul, body, and heart to a culture that makes a point to be untainted by surrounding communities, a culture that governs itself without any formal hand of power. A culture that is wealthy not by American standards. A culture that cannot be measured by coins or paper, but rather a culture that is rich in prosperity and happiness. A culture that can only be found amidst the Amish.

Many questions have been raised about this intransigent religious community. Strong faith and ardent adherence to three hundred year old traditions have awed and irritated, inspired and confused, but more importantly fascinated America for over a century. Why and how do the Amish continue to live in a separatist and communal culture that has thrived within in one of the most open, individualist societies on earth? Perhaps studying at the Amish culture will encourage us to look deeper into what fascinates us about their roots in deep American values. The Amish, so focused on living in the past in a world so focused on the future, have

developed a close community that embraces a tradition over three hundred years old that truly puts the power in the community's hands to control and dictate their future. Old Order Amish represent a cultural-religious movement of the early 16th century. In the mid 1800's, southeast Iowa attracted a unique religious group to its fertile agricultural soil as this group sought isolation, or sparsely populated areas, that had adequate economic possibilities. It has become popular belief that this started a reform movement within the Mennonite movement - an attempt to restore some of the traditional beliefs of the Mennonites. This movement resulted in the formation of one of the largest Amish groups west of the Mississippi River in Johnson County. However, this was to be only one group of many as " They have been in American Society for a little over two Centuries, and they cover over twenty states, a Canadian province, and some countries in Latin America" (Journal of Comparative Family Studies; Spring88, Vol. 19 Issue 1, p123-135, 13p). In spite of the harassment that made the Amish move from their original European home, the lifespan the Old Order Amish is frequently idealized in the modern American Mind. The history of the Amish dates back to the 1600's when they were known as the greatest conventional supporters of the Swiss Anabaptist Leader, Jacob Amman. According to the journal of Economic History, " They escaped religious persecution, and migrated to America in two Waves" (Journal of Economic History, Vol. 53, NO. 2 (1993), pp. 319-331), the first in the 1700s, and again between 1815 and 1860. The Amish people in America can hardly be considered a new religious sect, but rather a very old one rooted in the Mennonites who arose directly from the Reformation of the sixteenth century. However, although Mennonites read the Bible seriously, their behavior demonstrated a lack of

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dedication. Thus, the Amish group that developed out of the Mennonites, led by Jacob Amman, emphasized the need for a more serious understanding of what he called "the old ground and foundation" and was successful in gathering a multitude of followers. Membership in the Old Order Amish Mennonite Church is still not freely available; however, studies have shown that membership total about one hundred eighty thousand members spread across some twenty-two states, including over forty-five thousand in Ohio alone. Amman sought not to reform, but to instill the doctrine of the old Mennonite faith and traditions and to this day the Old Order Amish have kept their theology and culture preserved for what is believed to be how it was first established over three hundred years prior. Religion is the axis in which the Amish community revolves. Each local community has been divided into church districts, each containing anywhere from twenty-five to forty families. The size of each district is limited only by horse and buggy transportation, and because worship services are held in homes rather than a local church building, only a certain amount of people can be accommodated. Generally, there is only one Bishop per district, two to four preachers, and one deacon. Entire households will attend church service every other Sunday, with the intermediate Sundays spent at a neighbor's or extended family's house. Men, women, and children alike will gather in a member's house as this is easily accomplished by the construction of the first floor in which doors and walls are partitioned off to create one large space for gatherings. Everybody will shake hands that morning, and ministers will greet each other with a holy kiss as commanded in the Bible (I Thessalonians 5: 26). Preaching will take place at nine in the morning or earlier and typically end around noon followed by time of fellowship amongst men, women, and children. In

essence, Sunday meetings are an outward manifestation of the Amish religion. How religion is affiliated with how they think, purpose in life, and how they act. To the Amish, without religion they could not exist. They would have no stand against the world, nothing to fall back on, and lastly they would not be able to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. The Amish are in no way in support of any outward movement of their religion, or missionary work. Their religion is directed and established in order to make the Amish men, women, and children an upright, godly citizen and a first-rate farmer, and that is all. The Old Order Amish continue, virtually unchanged, the cultural-religious traditions of their ancestors. The Old Order Amish believe in mutual aid, or general reciprocity, and assist each other in many ways, the most famous being the barn raisings; however, in the same manner, they never practiced community of goods and still insist that members rely on farming as a source of wealth and goods to survive. Amish men and women assume what is to be considered the traditional and well-defined gender roles. Husbands are entitled to care for the well-being of the family and are therefore held to be the primary source for financial stability. Women are typically dedicated to housekeeping and motherhood. As in most families, these gender roles will vary from family to family and domination from husband to wife can be found in several different variations across a wide spectrum. For those families who don't rely on farming for their source of income, the husband is typically the breadwinner, however in the cases where a woman owns a business, the income may be mostly provided from her. When both husband and wife work at home, there has been a noticeable cross sharing of roles in which women can be found working in the shop or barn and men can be found around the house or in the garden. Furthermore,

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women will also share in decision made by the household. Although the man is considered to be the religious head of the home, his religious duties are focused more on the church and community and therefore the wife is the one who typically is very active in nurturing the children in their spiritual life. Networks of extended families provide a strong sense of independence amongst the Amish community. This extended family provides support from time of birth, to time of death. Family members are willing to help each other in any type of emergency, whether that be flood, fire, or worst-case scenario, death. However, it does not take an emergency to gather this community together, as some of the most famous gatherings, as mentioned before, is seen in the constructing of a new barn. Practices shared by the Old Order Amish, the largest Amish group, are collectively firm in the foundation laid by the forefathers by holding true to the values set forth hundreds of years prior. The Old Order Amish are a very conservative Christian faith group with an Anabaptist tradition that can be compared closely to the practices of many Fundamentalist or Evangelical churches. The Amish also believe their church has been given the authority from God to interpret his will. "

Submission to church is submission to God" (Rensberger, 2003).

Furthermore, the Amish believe in remain segregated from the world both physically and socially as it is believed to be of a polluting nature like a disease and therefore have no desire to be on the national electric grid as they believe this would connect them too much to the outside world. Amish are also strongly against war and practice a nonresistance attitude that rejects involvement with the military or warfare and must never resort to violence. However, they do not consider themselves as pacifists, as this would involve engaging in political action to promote peace. In part, the

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Amish tradition and believes may be due to the intense persecution that their ancestors endured as a result of government oppression. As a result, the Amish have adopted a congregational organization that is independent of each other. As each as their own leadership, there is no formal head of national office. Furthermore, like the majority of conservative Christian denominations, women are not allowed to hold positions of power and must subject themselves to a man's rule. The spoken language is a German Dialect called Pennsylvania Dutch. Schools are single-room buildings that offer schooling up to grade level eight. Any schooling thereafter is discouraged. Men follow the laws of the book of Hebrews in regards to beards and refrain from growing mustaches as they have a long association with military. Men dress in plain, dark colored suits whilst women wear plain colored dresses with long sleeves, a bonnet, and an apron. Vehicles, electrical devices and phones are still forbidden. The Amish do not collect anything from the Government such as welfare, unemployment, or Social Security, but rather have a mutual aid fund for those in need of financial assistance. Photography of oneself is forbidden as it has the potential to go against the word of God in the second commandment that states, " Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that... is in the earth..." Marriage outside the faith are not allowed, those who wish to be married are " published" in late October and are wed in either November or early December. As mentioned earlier, religious services are held bi-weekly on alternate Sundays and those Sundays in between are spent at either another congregation, friends, or family. Communion services are held twice a year in which any disagreements will be resolved by a meeting of council members who also discuss matters regarding lifestyle and

conduct. Media has often given an uneven balance of the Amish culture and focuses more on those who have split away from the traditional ways of the Old Amish. However, for those who question whether or not they even have a choice of their own at any point, they do. What is known as rumspringa is the point in a young adults life (generally at the age of sixteen an older) when the strict rules governing the Amish lifestyle are released from the child. The child has yet to be baptized and therefore has not committed his or herself to the Amish culture yet and is therefore encouraged to experience outside traditions and amenities that otherwise would not be available. Therefore, it is acceptable to attend parties, drink alcoholic beverages, wear jeans, visit the outside world, etc. The intent is to make sure that these young people are giving their informed consent if they so choose to be baptized. According to statistics, eighty to ninety percent choose to remain Amish. With so much the world has to offer, and with so much available at a wants desire, why do the Amish continue to live in a foraging society that relies on hard work, community, agriculture, and religion to survive. Furthermore, at some point, all members were given the choice to step out of the Amish culture and make a choice to take part in something else. An American culture that advertises the American dream, a national characteristic of the United States, a set of ideals in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success that has been instilled in the hearts of Americans as it is rooted in the Declaration of Independence as we are " endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights." Amongst those rights are " Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Yet despite the things promised by our ancestors, they find more comfort in their own community as they are supported by others without government conflicts, outside influences that

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could affect the culture or beliefs that are burned into the hearts of every baptized member who dedicates his or her life to living a life of purity in honor of God. The Amish have focused their hearts and goals on a lifestyle that focuses not in the best interest of just themselves, but the best interest of the community, and through that community have brought a group of people closer than most families here in America. This family oriented communities are willing to help in any way they can; whether that be small services such as lending a hand for an elderly lady to cross the street, or gathering the community as a whole to resurrect a new barn. The Amish, unlike our American culture, have instilled a sense of pride amongst the community as a whole. When one hurts, they all hurt. At the same time when one rejoices, the community rejoices. With that comes a respect for a foraging culture that puts family, friends, and God at the center of their lives. The self-centered ways of so many other cultures, admittedly even our own, that encourage taking all the necessary steps needed to gain independent wealth and recognition, even if that means stepping on the heads of other to get there, suddenly seem less appealing and perhaps over-emphasize some of the less important things that need not be the prominent factor for success. The Amish, although a foraging community that focuses on keeping traditional core values, have grown into a large community of culture-religious members who are dedicated to what they believe in. Americans may be awed , confused, and even astounded by some of the sacrifices that the Amish are willing to take to ensure that those core beliefs are not affected or altered in any way. Furthermore, unlike other cultures, even our own, their values have remained the same, and for many centuries. Perhaps the sacrifices made are not really sacrifices at all but instead a choice that

has been given only one scenario that works. That choice is a choice of dedication to whole-heartedly commit your soul, body, and heart to a culture that makes a point to be untainted by surrounding communities, a culture that governs itself without any formal hand of power. A culture that is wealthy not by American standards. A culture that cannot be measured by coins or paper, but rather a culture that is rich in prosperity and happiness. A culture that can only be found amidst the Amish.