

Book Reviews

Review of Yoder, Nathan E. 2014. *Together in the Work of the Lord: A History of the Conservative Mennonite Conference*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press.

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Nathan Yoder provides a history of the Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC) from its inception early in the twentieth century to its present situation. Yoder, professor of church history at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, has his own history in the CMC, and while no longer affiliated with the conference, he is a child of the conference. This is evidenced by the first-hand knowledge in which he describes the origins and life of the Conference, which is both refreshing and revealing of the book's intent. It is refreshing in that it allows an "insider's view" of the workings of the conference, absent in so many histories like this. This gives the book a depth it would not have with someone who was not nurtured and raised in the Conference. On the other hand, it is also revealing of the CMC's Historical Committee's "engaged approach to conserving and passing along the faith that marks the CMC story" (14). This approach may be necessary in this work, yet it does raise the question of objectivity. Any historian must balance intimacy with distance while demonstrating objectivity in the pursuit, processing, and presentation of the archival material at hand. This "familiar objectivity" is evident in much of Yoder's work (the term is of my own choosing and seems conspicuously absent in many histories).

Yoder has organized his work by proposing four major metaphors to understand the shifts, both temporally and ideologically, within the Conference. The first is a garden (chapters one to three), a mold or foundry (chapters four to six), a trademark (chapters seven to nine), and finally reading glasses (chapters ten and eleven). He argues that "each metaphor offers a particular way of understanding and living in relation to it," and that they were generated through a close interaction with the archival sources (35). It is helpful that Yoder makes sure the reader knows when he is shifting metaphors, and that he makes frequent mention of how he is reading the particular metaphor. However, the multiplicity of metaphors is confusing and the reader has to remember the symbol or metaphor that Yoder is using. While this may succeed in layering the work, it can also make it feel cumbersome and can make it appear as though the neat categorizations that the metaphors create are reflective of the life of the Conference. It also begs the question of whether there is one overriding metaphor that Yoder could have chosen to define the life and history of the CMC.

The first half of the book does well at mapping out the tentative beginnings of the Conferences as a "small assembly of Conservative Amish Mennonite ministers" from a variety of geographical regions who first met in 1910 (21). Their first meeting was focused around what Yoder says was the "age-old challenge of balancing the call to particularity and the call to engagement" (45). This is at the heart of the first six chapters of the book, which cover the period from 1910 to 1950. Yoder's chronological approach, sprinkled with narrational accounts, such as

Willard Mayer's Secret Calling, make the first half of the book very readable. It is well researched and follows the transition of the Conference from a small group of "like-minded" ministers and leaders to a five-thousand member organization that was facing cultural changes in the world in which they moved.

The second half of the book is much more focused, as was the Conference, on those cultural changes and the subsequent various programs and missions of the Conference. From the first Winter Bible School in 1952 to a plethora of agencies that developed under the Conference's theater of operation (yet another metaphor to help define the CMC), Yoder explains how that program helped move the group into a viable evangelical Anabaptist group. Yoder's claims that "CMC carries within its theology, tradition, and practices resources for passionate fidelity and committed spontaneity" (419). While this perspective may be true, it does beg the question of how, or whether, the Conference has changed significantly since its early years. When, according to Yoder, the Conference was defined, and defined itself, "through its stances towards related groups" (21). What is not as clearly evident in the reading of the book is whether that stance towards related groups has changed, and if so, when and how. This latter half of the book is enjoyable, but not nearly as clearly focused as the first half of the book. It is in this half of the book that Yoder's positive framing of change-minded leaders and programs become evident. This approach has the potential to not only negate the archival material, but also silence the more conservative "children" that the Conference has spawned (both those who have remained within the CMC and those who have removed themselves).

Yoder often opens a chapter or a section by reflecting about how he will do his work. These are often helpful aids, although at times they can be a bit disruptive and even awkwardly patronizing. These explanatory notes may be necessary aids because of the vast amount of information that Yoder brings to the table, yet they often feel disruptive or like one is being lectured so that one can, or will, understand the information properly. Much of this may have been negated with the inclusion of maps, charts, etc. instead of requiring the reader to track the shifting alliances and community connections

Historians such as Yoder always make choices about what to include in their work. It is fair to ask how Yoder chose what events or archival material to include. It would seem that in the history and development of the Conservative Amish-Mennonite Conference the *Diener Versammlungs* (ministers' gatherings) of the mid- and late nineteenth century so ably described by Paton Yoder in *Traditions and Transitions* warrant some mention. Perhaps space, or scope, dictated the exclusion of any mention of these ministers' meetings; yet, these events helped give some definition and shape to those early years of the Conference. There are numerous occasions where the information would have provided significant depth to Yoder's narrative. This ambiguity is perhaps the largest issue in Yoder's work. His work is meticulously researched, but there are a few occasions where a broader perspective in the research would have helped connect the Conference to the larger world in which it was formed and developed. If, "from its beginning," as Yoder claims, "the Conference defined itself through its stances toward related

groups” (21), then these connections to the larger Anabaptist world—both temporally and ideologically—should be carefully mapped out.

Nevertheless, Yoder's work is and will be an essential part of the understanding the Conservative Mennonite Conference's history and their present world. His access to the sources, his interpretation of those sources, and his narrational form of presenting the sources make this a book of importance to anyone who wants to understand the origins, development, and present life of the Conservative Mennonite Conference.

Review of **Smucker, Janneken. *Amish Quilts: Crafting an American Icon*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.**

By Jana Hawley,¹ *John and Doris Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Arizona*

In this ambitious work, author Janneken Smucker provides a fascinating account of Amish quilts by placing the quilts into the context of history, culture, art, economy, and community. The in-depth book presents more than 100 spectacular color photographs that provide visual context for the well-researched and written text. Smucker is a fifth generation quilter. As a quilter, she understands the meticulous skill and aesthetic nuances needed to produce a magnificent quilt. Her enthusiasm of quilts led her to an assistant curator position at the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. As a woman of Mennonite heritage, she inherently better understands the Amish culture than many others who have written about Amish quilts.

Smucker couches the entire work in the context of Amish history and culture. As she points out in the introduction, the purpose of the book is not to discuss what Amish quilts look like or how they are made. Indeed many other authors have already done this (Koolish 1994; Pellman 2002). Instead, Smucker helps the reader understand the generalizations and stereotypes of Amish quilts so that an even deeper understanding of the quilts can unfold. She then accurately describes the transitional phenomenon of when outsiders began to collect Amish quilts as pieces of art, an investment, or a souvenir from a trip through Amish country. When collectors became enamored with Amish quilts, the quilts moved from a cultural tradition to an economically driven artifact that will forever change the purpose and production of Amish quilts.

Throughout the book, Smucker has visually made her point with remarkable photos of Amish quilts. The photos range from vibrant examples of quilts as art to close-up images that point to the detail of Amish quilts. Each photograph draws the reader into the book searching for the narrative that supports the photos.

Smucker reminds the reader throughout the book of the historic and cultural tenets of the

Amish. She often provides narratives that further couch the work into cultural context. For example, in the introduction, Smucker explains the *Ordnung*, the rules that define Amish life and explains why one Amish community varies from another. She also embeds many historically accurate accounts that illustrate Amish life and the actions they take. A case in point is her description of the thirty-seven tornadoes that devastated the Midwest on Palm Sunday of 1965. Amish came from all over the United States to help rebuild the wreckage, particularly in northern Indiana. In her account, quilts became part of the relief effort. Thus, quilts serve as a symbol that binds communities together. This and many other stories throughout the book illustrate how the quilt remains a touch-point of Amish culture.

Outsiders are often curious about the Amish, and thus the Amish have become the objects of cultural tourism and idealized perceptions. Many view the Amish as backward and representative of early American life. Much of this has been depicted in movies, documentaries, and even reality shows. As a result, symbolic icons that represent the Amish have developed, including the horse and buggy, one-room schools, barn raisings, lack of technology, kerosene lanterns, and the Amish quilt.

Amish quilts vary widely not only from region to region, but from quilt maker-to-quilt maker. Often Amish quilters are creating quilts that align more with modern quilting trends than with what outsiders view as distinctive “classic Amish quilts.” Quilt designs are also determined by local preferences or availability of materials. Sometimes the quilters would experiment with new designs, color combinations, or techniques, but often they would revert to their favorites. Even though there is variability, Amish quilts still often are bound by certain local church or community rules that determine how to construct a quilt, what pattern and colors are chosen, what tools are used to produce, and what modes of work are used. For the Amish, the quilt continues to serve as a reminder of community, family, virtue, hard work, and thrift.

Often passed from generation to generation, or made as a treasured gift for a milestone family event, the Amish quilt was not intended as a piece of art but instead as either a functional warm bed cover or as a symbolic gesture that binds the generations and the community. Friendship quilts were a popular way for Amish quilt makers to work together toward a final product that would be gifted to a teacher, a minister, or someone that was leaving the community to live in another settlement. Smucker creates a dialog that sends your imagination to where the reader can imagine the quilt being imparted with family stories, personal significances, and cultural values. For example, on page 57, she describes Maude Miller’s story of the maroon nine-patch quilt and how the story remained with the quilt even in subsequent generations.

To the outsider, the Amish quilt has been seen as a representation of modernist American art. Smucker writes a detailed account of how collectors, curators, and critics have represented the Amish quilt as art. Her account tells of collectors such as Doug Thompkins, Jonathan Holstein, and Gail van der Hoof who built collections of Amish quilts by paying pennies on the dollar for quilts that turned out to be worth thousands. The transition of Amish quilts from the

Amish home to the museum wall also changed the ways in which the Amish viewed their quilts. No longer were they only an artifact that bound their families and communities, but now they were seen as marketable items that could supplement family farming income.

Smucker describes the phenomenon of when outsiders began to collect Amish quilts as pieces of art, an investment, or as a souvenir from a trip through Amish country. When collectors became enamored with Amish quilts, the quilts evolved from a cultural tradition to a value-driven artifact that impacted the ways in which Amish quilts were made and distributed. As the quilts became more valued by outsiders, some Amish families became active participants in the marketing of quilts. Amish owned quilt shops and fabric stores became part of the business-mix found in most Amish settlements. Smucker illustrates this through the narrative told about David Riehl's quilt business. Not only was Riehl selling quilts, but he was also brokering Amish culture.

Like any object, the Amish quilt is imbued with dynamic meaning. As the quilts moved from the hands of the Amish to the collectors, tourists, and museums, the meaning of the quilt has changed. Smucker depicts this transition in a complete story that is rich in narrative, history, and cultural explanations. Even though much of the book focuses on this transition, it is an important piece to add to the understanding of the purpose and place of the Amish quilt in modern society.

Endnote

¹Jana M. Hawley did her dissertation on the business practices of the Old Order Amish of Missouri. The study focused on the cooperation among Amish business owners as well as the competition between Amish and non-Amish business owners. She and her two sons lived among the Old Order Amish of Jamesport, Missouri for eleven months while she collected data working daily alongside the Amish. She is the author of "The Commoditization of Old Order Amish Quilts: Enduring and Changing Cultural Meanings" *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 23(2):102-14 (2005).

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Review of **Kraybill, Donald. 2014. *Renegade Amish: Beard Cutting, Hate Crimes, and the Trial of the Bergholz Barbers*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.**

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Donald Kraybill is the author, coauthor, or editor of over a dozen books on Anabaptist and Amish culture. The latest addition to this list is *Renegade Amish: Beard Cutting, Hate Crimes, and the Trial of the Bergholz Barbers*. Like its predecessors in Kraybill's oeuvre, this is a thorough, even-handed, and accessible volume that provides keen insight on Amish culture.

The details of the purported crimes of the Bergholz Amish are well known. Under the alleged direction of Bishop Samuel Mullet, members of the maverick Amish community perpetrated five attacks in the fall of 2011. After forcing their way into the homes of their victims, the assailants set upon both women and men, cutting their hair and, in the case of the men, completely shearing off their beards. Gentle barbering, this was not: several victims were treated so roughly that they bled. Eventually, a total of sixteen members of the community (Mullet among them) were arrested on a total of almost 90 federal felony charges, including conspiracy, lying, and obstruction justice. Among the more notable charges were claims that the defendants had violated the federal Matthew Sheppard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act by committing religiously-motivated hate crimes. In proceedings that drew international interest, they were tried in 2012.

Kraybill's brisk account—the narrative clocks in at a mere 160 pages—traces the Bergholz case from its origins through the federal trial. Writing for a broad audience, he briefly traces the history of the Amish in America, outlines their core beliefs and practices, and explains how the Bergholz sect was established and operated under the control of Mullet. *Renegade Amish* is not a polemic aimed at proving that Mullet's group somehow wasn't authentically Amish and had devolved into something most accurately described as a "cult," although both matters are addressed frankly. Rather, it endeavors to show how the beard-cutting attacks fit into the overall development of the fringe Amish community under Mullet's iron-fisted leadership.

Popular myths to the contrary notwithstanding, crimes are not unknown among the Amish. Nonetheless, as Kraybill shows, the crimes ascribed to Mullet and his followers were extraordinary, as nonviolence is a core element of Amish life. The attacks were all the more unusual because they targeted well-known symbols of Amish culture, hair and beards. These circumstances were so apparently strange that the alleged offenses drew the attention of the news media and federal prosecutors, who ultimately decided that they fell under the new federal hate crimes statute. It fell to a jury to decide whether the beard-cuttings were in fact hate crimes motivated by religious bias or simply part of an intramural squabble among the Amish. After a three-week trial, the jury convicted Mullet and fifteen of his followers on the federal hate crimes charges, as well as lesser charges. As the alleged mastermind of the beard-cutting plot, the bishop drew the harshest sentence: fifteen years in prison. His followers received lesser sentences.

Kraybill was not a mere spectator to these proceedings. As he acknowledges in *Renegade Amish*, he was called upon by prosecutors to offer expert testimony on the history and culture of the Amish. His participation at the trial might raise some legitimate questions about his objectivity in chronicling the case of the Bergholz Amish. After all, how could a de facto part of the prosecution team render an account that did not reflect negatively on the defendants? But to his credit, Kraybill's treatment of them in *Renegade Amish* seems nothing if not fair-minded; he does not seem bent on vilifying them and establishing their legal guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Rather, he argues that Mullet and his followers essentially lost their way and drifted – with disastrous results – from mainstream Amish life (at least in the sense that Kraybill himself understands the faith and its traditions).

Although he generally seems fair, one wishes that Kraybill had reflected more on his courtroom experiences and even compared them to those of John Hostetler, who testified in the famous Amish school attendance case, *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1972). Hostetler of course found himself on this side of the defendants, not the prosecution, in that case, arguing that the application of a compulsory school attendance statute violated their religious liberty. Did these two scholars have differing views of the parameters of state power vis-à-vis the Amish, or can their perspectives be reconciled in that they both seem to have an over-arching concern for safeguarding a particular type of Amish community, one that is ultimately too vulnerable to defend itself? (The task of answering these kinds of thorny questions might fall to some enterprising scholar interested in analyzing how expert testimony from academics helps to mediate relationships between the Amish and the state.)

One of the drawbacks in writing about recent history is that portions of the narrative can become outdated rather quickly. This is at least partly true with the denouement of Kraybill's book. After it went to press, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit overturned the hate crimes convictions of the Bergholz Amish. The convictions were thrown out by the appellate panel because the trial court had erroneously instructed the jury on the degree of religious motivation required under the hate crime statute. This was a not a total exoneration of the defendants, however, as their other non-hate crime convictions remained standing. Mullet still will have to serve a total of nearly eleven years, but eight of his codefendants already are out of prison, having already fulfilled their much shorter sentences.

Subsequent editions of the book surely will have to include these developments and a reflection on their implications for the federal hate crimes law. As the statute relates to the protection of religion, it is almost certain to remain contested legal terrain, as American courts never have taken an entirely consistent approach to shielding religious entities and behavior, especially when it comes to intramural squabbles among members of one faith. Indeed, perhaps the most common approach is for courts to throw up their hands and claim that the matter is beyond their purview. If nothing else, the Bergholz case is noteworthy—and worthy of this serious treatment—because it centered on conduct so extraordinary that it prompted the secular legal system to lurch into action.