



A humility-based enterprising community: the Amish people in Lancaster County

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to add to the understanding of humility-based economic development and entrepreneurship among the Amish – a religious group – in the USA, whose culture values asceticism, frugality, thrift and work, as well as humility.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper presents an ethnographic research study.

Findings – Amish adults teach their young that work is pleasurable. In order to maintain their values, the Amish try to avoid close contact with people who do not hold the same traditions. Furthermore, due to religious discrimination in the past, the Amish often exhibit a mistrust of outsiders. The primary motive of self-employment among the Amish is neither profit nor prestige, but rather the maintenance of cultural values, separately from mainstream society such as to emphasise humility over pride. Self-employment is perceived as much a social activity as an economic activity, and very importantly, it is compatible with religious beliefs.

Practical implications – Given the choice, the Amish prefer *not* to work for enterprises in mainstream society. These people prefer to be self-employed or to work amongst themselves, as it is their belief that a community of believers is the context for life.

Originality/value – This research paper reports on an ethnographic research study that reveals the reasons why Amish people in Lancaster County choose self-employment as a means of livelihood, the changing nature of their enterprises, and the causal variables explaining why there is a shift from farm-based self-employment on family farms, to non-land-based entrepreneurship.

Keywords Religion, Entrepreneurialism, Self employed workers, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Therefore, the Lord God sent him forth . . . to till the ground (Genesis 3:23)

Introduction

The Amish people[1] are an offshoot of the Mennonites, a religious group that was established in 1525, in Zurich, Switzerland. Named for Menno Simons, the Mennonites had beliefs which were considered radical at the time; for instance, they believed in the separation of church and state. These people felt that a religion should involve only voluntary believers and that no religion should be imposed upon children at birth. Keeping in line with this conviction, they refused to baptise their infants. Instead, individuals could be voluntarily baptised, if and when they felt mature enough to decide for themselves. This religious group was, therefore, referred to as the Anabaptists.

Anabaptists were persecuted in Europe, because they did not believe in baptism and because they desired separation of church and state. Religious freedom attracted them to America and according to Stauffer (1941), the first of these arrived in the USA in 1683. Thus, they left Switzerland, Germany and Alsace Lorraine, for the USA,



where a Quaker, William Penn, promised them religious freedom and the federal government offered them land grants.

In 1693, Swiss-born Jakob Ammann felt that the Mennonites were straying from a strictly religious background. He then proceeded to establish a more conservative and disciplined offshoot, which came to be known as the Amish. More so than the Mennonites, the Amish were – and continue to be – careful not to accept innovative technology without considering the effects thereof, on their lifestyle, which values asceticism, frugality, simplicity, thrift, work ethic and perhaps most importantly, humility and the family unit. Hostetler (1993) noted that some aspects of being Amish have remained comparatively unchanged for three centuries.

Among the largest concentrations of Amish families is found in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County, which is 946 square miles. It was home to 500 Amish persons in 1900 (Lowry, 1997), and to 25,000 today. Two-thirds of the land in this county is used for agriculture and this area is said to be the most productive non-irrigated farmland in the USA. Yet, farming here involves no highly sophisticated technology. Farms are small and do not benefit from economies of scale. Lee (1984) noted an average farm size of 60 acres.

The objective of this paper is to give an account of Amish self-employment and entrepreneurship in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Focus is on Amish values and the successful small business sector that thrives without modernisation. As stated by Farmer and Richman (1965, pp. 156-7), "Prevailing religious beliefs and cultural values . . . have a direct and very significant bearing on the dominant view toward work and achievement."

Religion and enterprising communities

The impact of religion on economic development has long been a subject of research interest. Classical Social Theorist, Weber (1904) compared taxation figures in Baden, and reported 4,000,000 marks per 1,000 Jews; 954,000 marks per 1,000 Protestants; and only 589,000 marks per 1,000 Catholics. His thesis argued that while Protestantism stressed the development of economic security, Catholics believed that it was easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a wealthy man to go to heaven.

The Weberian thesis and the concept of the Protestant Work Ethic became highly influential, and this prompted much research. Farmer and Richman (1965, p. 157), for example, wrote:

There is a close correlation of countries in terms of how deeply the Calvinist spirit has penetrated their economic and social behavior with real per capita income and level of economic development. Thus, in 1958, all fifteen countries of the world with per capita incomes of over \$700 per year were those which had followed the Calvinist ethic extensively; and, with the possible exceptions of France and Belgium, all were quite extensively Protestant in religion. No country where the Calvinist ethic had deeply penetrated was not included in this list of most wealthy countries, while none of the extensively non-Calvinist nations had yet achieved such economic success.

More recently, Klandt (1987, p. 31) found that a Protestant upbringing "is more likely to lead to independent business activity than a Catholic upbringing".

Every coin has two sides and not all academics agreed with the Weberian school. In response to Weber (1904, 1905), Sombart (1911) examined economic development in Europe and this was translated as Sombart (1951). In this work, Sombart observed that

as Jews moved from southern Europe to northern Europe, the economic centre of Europe shifted with them; he then linked economic development in Europe to Jewish entrepreneurs and argued that they influenced the outward form of modern capitalism. Ex-President of the USA, William Howard Taft (1919, p. 7) wrote about the Jews who “developed trade, poetry, philosophy, science and literature”. Taft (1919, p. 10) also gave examples of how Europeans prospered by means of Jews, who:

... were forbidden to hold land. The nobility manufactured the liquor, and they were willing and anxious to have the Jews sell it, who thus, for lack of other occupation, became the innkeepers, the purveyors in the demoralizing liquor business.

Weber (1922) maintained that Protestantism, by encouraging self-restraint and accumulation of assets, contributed to capitalism. This work was translated by Alexander Morell Henderson and Talcott Parsons and published as Weber (1947).

Lewis (1955, p. 105) explained:

If a religion lays stress upon material values, upon thrift and productive investment, upon honesty in commercial relations, upon experimentation and risk-bearing ... it will be helpful to growth, whereas in so far as it is hostile to these things, it tends to inhibit growth. Where Theravada Buddhism is the backbone of social and cultural values ... it may have a restraining effect on the accumulation of wealth and the rise of an entrepreneurial class.

Yet, Guiso *et al.* (2003) found that Buddhists were in favour of increasing private ownership of business and industry, more so than any other of the groups in their study; the authors also noted that Buddhists were in favour of competition, more so than Christians, Muslims and Hindus, but less than Jews.

Zingales (2006, p. 228) argued, “Buddhism and Christianity seem most conducive to capitalism, and Islam the least”. Zingales (2006, pp. 228-9) elaborated:

Comparing the average response of different religious denominations we find that, other things being equal, Buddhism seems to promote the best attitudes towards the market system. Christian religions follow ... Islam appears as the religion least conducive to capitalism. Muslims are very much against competition, against private property and less willing to trade off equality for incentives.

In contrast, Malaysian Prime Minister Badawi (2006, p. 208) suggested:

Islam preaches a holistic and comprehensive notion of development in this world and for the hereafter. It does not negate the pursuit of material development in this world ... The teachings of Islam are also eminently suited to development in the modern, knowledge-based economy ... Besides, its emphasis on knowledge, Islam also enjoins a work ethic that equips the individual to excel in economic pursuits.

What impact does religion have on one’s decision to be an entrepreneur, and does this affect the nature of entrepreneurship? Fishberg (1911, p. 531) observed that Jews were concentrated in precarious occupations such as commerce; he elaborated, suggesting that Jews were “ambitious and persevering, possessing an enormous amount of ‘push’ which he cannot always bring into play while struggling against adverse circumstances”. Weber (1930) – in the English translation of his 1920 revision of Weber (1904, 1905) works – went into detail about social class as a function of religion, and he cited related works including Sombart (1913) and its translation, i.e. Sombart (1915). More recently, Rath and Kloosterman (2003, pp. 123-4) elaborated:

The arrival of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century and later from Eastern Europe, and of Roman Catholics from Westphalia throughout the nineteenth century, greatly influenced the Dutch economic landscape as their business acumen enhanced the nation's economic and cultural wealth.

Modernisation, entrepreneurship and the Amish religion

The USA is a pluralistic society in which many minorities retain their respective partial-universes, while sharing a core universe with other Americans. Each coexists in a state of mutual accommodation, tolerance, or at times cooperation. The Amish People, of whom there are about 150,000 nation-wide, have self-imposed a status of social marginality upon themselves, espousing their own community at the exclusion of others, such as to resist modernisation; they focus their energy on religion, family and work values leading to successful self-employment in the absence of innovation or modernisation.

Levy (1966) described modernisation as the ratio of inanimate to animate sources of power. Berger *et al.* (1973, p. 8) noted that social scientists often discussed the concept of modernisation interchangeably with that of economic growth and development; they suggested that modernisation “must be seen in close relation to economic growth – more specifically, to the particular growth processes released by recent technology”. Yet, the Amish have prospered using animate sources of power; they have shown that economic development is possible without modernisation. The Amish are an extreme example of a people who value economic development, through a highly disciplined work ethic and a propensity for small business, while excluding from their lives the necessity to modernise. In Amish society, entrepreneurial work is valued as a pleasure which allows individuals to perpetuate religious beliefs. Thus, the Amish view of entrepreneurship looks beyond the maximisation of monetary profit. As stated by Penrose (1959, p. 39):

The fact that businessmen, though interested in profits, have a variety of other ambitions as well, some of which seem to influence (or distort) their judgment about the “best” way of making money, has often been discussed primarily in connection with the controversial subject of “profit maximization”.

Foster (1984, p. 79) noted the Amish perception that “factory jobs were both personally unrewarding and economically undependable”. Hostetler (1993) and Kraybill (1989) elaborated on Amish culture. Lowry (1997) focused on tobacco farming among the Amish. Lowery and Noble (2000) examined the occupational structure of the largest Amish settlement in Ohio. Stoll (2002) explained why the Amish refuse to use motorised machinery for fieldwork, where it would alter agricultural production that currently uses no pesticides, no herbicides and no genetic modification; given that farm-work is the life of an Amish family, it must embrace rest and pleasure. Based on interviews with over 150 Amish entrepreneurs, Kraybill and Nolt (2004) traced the rise and impact of businesses in Lancaster County, home to the oldest Amish community. Hawley (2005) studied Amish business practices in Missouri, with particular attention given to Amish women in business.

Much has been written about innovation-based entrepreneurship, as pioneered by Schumpeter (1934). There is also significant literature on opportunity-based entrepreneurship, as described by Kirzner (1979). Shapero (1975) was among those

who discussed necessity-based entrepreneurship. This paper will now look at religion-inspired humility-based self-employment among the Amish People.

Methodology

With the methodological mandate to be inductive, naturalistic and sensitive to context, it was necessary for the researcher to be submerged into Amish lifestyle, for an extended period of time, such as to develop closeness in the social sense. This was a challenge because separateness from the world is fundamental to Amish beliefs; a central concern among the Amish is spiritual purity, and isolationism is the means to this. Interaction with other cognitive systems is, therefore, kept to a minimum, and is generally limited to the economic realm.

While the Amish have a mistrust of outsiders, the Mennonites cater to commercialism and are relatively open to outsiders. Therefore, relationships were established with Mennonite friends of Amish people, in order to be introduced to Amish families. After the author demonstrated genuine interest and respect for Amish values, one Amish family allowed the author to move in, and to participate in milking chores and other activities. Data could then be collecting through participation as well as observation. Thus, ethnographic methods included participant observation, as described by Burgess (1984) and Edgerton and Langess (1974). Triangulation was used for verification, as recommended by Patton (1982, 1987, 1990).

The Amish have their own dialect; although they live in America, the Amish primarily speak *Plaudeutsch*, a dialect from northern Germany. This, however, was not a problem, the researcher being fluent in German. A difficulty arose, however, as the Amish believe that photography is sinful, and they do not approve of audio recording – otherwise very useful in ethnography. The author therefore relied on stenography to record interviews. An assistant took notes simultaneously, and both sets were compared for accuracy.

Beliefs and symbolism

Central to the belief system of Amish society is humility expressed as simplicity – in dress, in worship, and in work. The Amish believe in the development of simple, self-sustaining means to livelihood. They reject all modernisation which threatens to erode their traditional way of life. To avoid diluting their beliefs, the Amish have consciously refrained from joining mainstream society. An Amish interviewee explained to the author that he knew he was “missing out” on some aspects of life, but this was “worth it, because family life is most important”.

The Amish religion is rooted in the strong belief in God and in the community; the people believe that belonging to each other is a prerequisite to understanding the work of God. An elderly Amish man told the author, “Because we reject infant baptism, each member joins voluntarily and shares responsibly”. All this binds the Amish a sub-culture, which they call their brotherhood. Interaction with outsiders kept to a minimum, and is generally limited to the economic realm, for example, at a roadside stand or farmers market.

While the Amish people believe that a community of voluntary believers is the context for life, the fundamental unit of Amish society and of the economy is the family. An Amish woman explained, “Technology enables individuals to drift apart, while the lack of technology forces individuals to struggle together, thereby

encouraging closer ties, and strengthening the family unit.” This explains why, although Mennonites accept motor vehicles, Amish people own neither tractors nor automobiles. The horse-drawn cart is the basic form of transportation.

The horse-drawn vehicles of different Amish families vary according to the specific traditions of local church districts. The box-like style of Amish buggies is symbolic of the lack of pretension in Amish life. The body is either made from wood or fibreglass. Tops are sometimes vinyl. A buggy may take ten days to build, and cost a couple of thousand dollars. Horse-drawn vehicles vary slightly according to specific traditions of local church districts. The typical travelling speed of a buggy is 20 kilometres per hour. Rubber tires are not permitted among the Amish.

The horse in Amish society has several roles. Horses are essential in the provision of transportation. They pull heavy cargoes, and they enable people to travel to and from neighbouring towns. On Amish farms, horses are used to plough fields, to sow seeds and later for harvest. Given that mules have more stamina than do horses, “mules make better farmers and often both work together” the author was told. Both mules and horses are compatible with Amish lifestyle, avoiding any form of ecological damage. An interviewee explained to the author:

A tractor, a truck and the like are viewed as polluting to the land with their exhaust, while their weight and their broad tires cause physical damage to the ground; in contrast, animals fertilise the ground.

Although outsiders may perceive these people as living in the past, the Amish do not consider themselves as static, but rather, they view themselves to be successful entrepreneurs in the business of making things and growing food. When asked by the author about the lack of scale economies on Amish farmers, an Amish farmer replied that “life must be seen in the context of a sense of belonging to a community, such that every member feels needed”.

Central to Amish culture is a highly disciplined work ethic. Idleness is shunned. Discipline and self-determination are admired; therefore, the Amish frown on socialist measures such as unemployment insurance, welfare programs and social security payments. However, Amish capitalism includes altruism, family cohesion and a sense of responsibility to the extended family and to the community. This is exemplified by functions such as barn raisings, which are communal events.

The Amish are generally eager to help one another. One Amish woman explained to the author, “There is a strong emphasis on service to others”. The Luneville Sewing Circle, for instance, involves 15 women who have been meeting regularly since the mid-1950s, for the purpose of sewing diapers, panties and gowns for the poor. As well, they make toys for children.

The Amish wear distinctive clothing, the reason being that standardised dress symbolises humility and loyalty to the community. Keeping in line with the religious ideals of searching for simplicity and humility, both men and women seek a modest appearance. Men and boys alike wear broad-rimmed hats, made of black felt or straw. Among men, beards are required after marriage. Moustaches are shaven, an elderly interviewee explained, “as these were traditionally worn by soldiers in Germany”. Shirts are of solid colours. Suits are hand-made of dark fabrics. Coats are straight-cut with no lapels. Suit coats and vests have no buttons. Black footwear falls in line with plain broad-fall trousers which are held up by suspenders such as to avoid fitting

tightly at the waist. Amish women wear long dresses with long sleeves. These are usually very plain, made of solid-coloured fabrics, with cape and apron. It is the norm for Amish women to have long hair and a prayer head-covering, which is white for married women and black for single girls. During cold weather, a bonnet and shawl are worn. Children do not have styles of their own, but rather both boys and girls are expected to dress, look and act like adults. The author noticed that girls have dolls, but with no faces.

An Amish home must also look humble, unadorned, and painted white. In 1919, Amish leaders agreed that houses should not be connected to electricity, lest this could lead to temptations and hence deterioration of family values. There is no phone in the house, but there is access to one not far away, in case of emergency.

Each house alternates as a church, since the Amish never build churches per se; they believe that each home can serve as a house of God. This is consistent with the cultural importance given to frugality and thrift. No money is spent on a separate church building.

Propagating cultural values

Amish society is very structured, with each individual having an assigned role. It is the duty of a wife to oversee all affairs of the home, including the appearance of the house and garden as well as raising the children and sending them to school, where cultural values are reinforced. Laundry is solely the responsibility of girls and women; daughters learn from their mothers. While field work is the occupation of men, women work alongside men during the harvest. Tobacco, for instance, is harvested in late August and in early September at which time entire families can be seen in the fields.

Schools are never far from the home, as there are over 100 one-room school-houses scattered across Lancaster County. Every Amish family has access to an Amish school within a four-kilometre distance. Each school typically caters from 20 to 40 Amish children up to the age of 16. Eight grades are taught simultaneously in the one classroom. An Amish school is a place where social skills are developed and sports are practised, but most importantly, Amish schools focus on preparing students to become productive members of Amish society. The teacher is either Amish or Mennonite and stresses a sense of community, humility, simplicity, responsibility and the fear of God. There is minimal reference to science, technology, conspicuous consumption and the military. On some days, students bring pets to school.

Homework is a rare phenomenon as it is understood that the children are kept busy helping their respective families with chores. In fact, preference is given to learning by doing rather than by simply sitting in class. School attendance after the age of 12 is limited to three or four hours per week.

Most of one's education is acquired through a process of watching elders in daily life. Children are, therefore, taught to respect their elders, to obey them, and to learn from them. From a very young age, Amish children develop a close relationship with their parents. Parents spend almost all of their time with their children, teaching them Amish cultural values. It is not from formal education in school, but rather from their parents that children learn to become self-sufficient in life.

Amish boys normally learn a variety of skills on their father's farm. This typically includes cabinetry, carpentry, furniture-making and masonry. Such skills are helpful

when seeking non-farm employment or contractual work to enhance or replace subsistence farming. The author observed a heavy reliance on apprenticeship.

Most importantly for the Amish, each generation transmits cultural values to the next. This includes asceticism, frugality and thrift, virtues which Weber (1904, 1905) linked to entrepreneurial behaviour. Children thus become predisposed towards self-employment, as parents guide them along an almost pre-determined road in life. The young are not encouraged to explore such as to discover themselves, but rather to fit into Amish society, and to feel needed within it. Often, a son learns his trade from his father. Even when a son does not adopt the same profession as his father, it is practical to learn as many manual skills as possible. A son becomes the apprentice of his father at a very young age. Not only does a son learn how to work, but also more importantly according to Amish tradition, he is conditioned into accepting the Amish belief that work is healthy and enjoyable. During his spare time, a boy will memorise verses from the Bible, in German and English. This will encourage him to choose humility, simplicity and contentment as a way of life. The same way that sons are close with their fathers, mothers are close with their daughters, teaching them to knit, sew, cook, quilt, garden and perform housekeeping tasks.

If an Amish woman wants to marry an outsider, she must leave the community, unless he joins Amish society. A deterrent to her leaving is that she is unprepared for secular society, while a stumbling block in the attempt to become Amish is the dialect.

Amish enterprise

Residents told the author that there are approximately 5,000 Amish farms in Lancaster County; these are small with no economies of scale. Long hours are invested in the careful planning of crops; this enables Amish farmers to be among the most productive in the world. The Amish have a deep love for their land, and consequently crop rotation is taken very seriously. Much energy is focused to transforming poor soil into productive farmland. Horses fertilise the fields as they plough and harrow.

People grow what they eat, and they eat much of that which they grow. Common crops include corn, hay, wheat, tobacco, soya beans, barley, potatoes and other vegetables. Menus reflect the season. Food is shared with relatives, friends and the needy around the world. Sometimes, surplus is sold.

Profit is given less importance than is religion and its values. The Amish are aware that larger farms would allow them to further benefit from economies of scale. On the other hand, smaller farms allow families to live closer to one another, and for these people, it is more important to have neighbours nearby than to have a larger farm.

Farmers told the author that a typical Amish farmer of Lancaster County has six horses and 35 dairy cows. They elaborated that whether a farmer owns 50 or 100 acres of land, about ten acres are devoted to pasture for the almost three dozen cattle. A cow's diet might consist of a blend consisting of 50 per cent corn and 50 per cent hay. At its peak, the average cow produces ten US gallons of milk per day. Cows are milked twice a day, in the early morning and in the late afternoon. This encourages people to perpetuate their custom of early to bed early to rise.

Since, obtaining electricity from a public utility would be contrary to Amish cultural values, cows are milked either by hand, or by diesel-powered milking machines. Careful attention is paid to maintaining a hygienic environment. Milk and ice-cream

made from it are deemed satisfactory for personal consumption. However, the law prohibits the sale of homemade ice-cream produced from unprocessed milk.

By milking their own cows, making their own ice-cream, planting their own fruits and vegetables and slaughtering their own cattle, hogs and poultry, the Amish diet is fairly self-sufficient. Surplus calves, usually male, are sold for their meat. The cash is often spent on flour, sugar and sometimes coffee. While it is the norm for an Amish family to own cattle, sheep are much less common, but nonetheless valued for their wool, as well as their meat.

Farm income is supplemented by a variety of activities, some of them seasonal. This includes making furniture and crafts, which are often sold from the house. Such home-based enterprises allow family members to work together, reinforcing the Amish family unit. It also avoids commuting. On Sundays, no sales are made.

Amish farmers often sell surplus fruits, vegetables, and compost from stands near their homes. Some participate in farmers' markets. Sales peak in the late summer and early autumn. Others offer specific services, and some tend to sell primarily to non-Amish customers.

Carpet-making also peaks in the autumn. When the author asked the reason for this, an elderly Amish woman explained:

When an Amish girl weds, her mother brings leftover balls of fabric, leftovers from making clothing, and she brings these to a carpet-maker who will weave it. This happens in the fall because couples generally get married in October and November, when farms demand relatively less work.

Farms tend to remain in the possession of a same family, from one generation to the next, and the Amish generally prefer agriculture over other occupations, as it allows them to work without any threat to the family unit. A problem, however, is that the dramatic population growth among the Amish has resulted in a shortage of agricultural land. There are no longer enough farms for all the young, and long-established farms have been sub-divided so many times that many have become crowded. It was explained to the author that young members of Amish communities have, therefore, been considering employment in the woodwork trade, cottage industries and farm-related activities.

Hence, although Amish people prefer to work on their family farm, this is no longer an easy option for many. For some years, people moved from Lancaster County to other areas, but it appears that young people today prefer to stay in Lancaster County and work in non-farm activities, rather than move to faraway farmland.

A typical Amish enterprise takes the legal form of a sole proprietorship or else that of a partnership, into which each partner contributes capital and from which no salaries are paid. These businesses are forms of self-employment. Interviewees told the author that very few Amish firms are incorporated. This minimises paperwork and reduces tax deductions. The Amish see this as an incentive to make their enterprises profitable by being productive.

Although the USA Small Business Administration has programs to help such firms, the Amish do not condone government interaction in the economy, and they refuse to accept government support. Section 310 of the Medicare Section of the American Social Security Act permits the Amish to apply for exemption from self-employment tax.

The author noted a very low-failure rate of Amish firms. In addition to their Weberian work ethic and frugality, explanatory variables may include the fact that the Amish are focused and cautious. Reflecting their preference for a family operation,

the Amish stay away from mass production. They give much attention to details, resulting in high-product quality. Seldom does an Amish enterprise have more than seven employees. Many artisans have more clients than they can provide for. Yet, none of the small Amish entrepreneurs interviewed by the author expressed interest in expansion.

Some Amish buggies are exported, but this is done via non-Amish middlemen. Handmade Amish quilts[2] also find their way around the world.

Although the Amish economy is capitalist in its orientation, and despite the fact that the Amish People resent socialist intervention on the part of the government, a voluntary form of socialism exists among the Amish. While they reject externally imposed measures, the Amish accept their own cultural belief that each is responsible for the welfare of others.

Conclusion

During WWII, Stauffer (1941, p. 65) observed, “Pennsylvania Dutch folk, especially the women, work hard”. A decade later, Williams (1952, p. 503) wrote, “The Pennsylvania ‘Dutch’ were honest, industrious, intelligent and neat, and so they have remained”. Gehman (1965, p. 227) added, “the Amish – and to a lesser degree their neighbors, the Mennonites and the Brethren, or Dunkers – have managed to resist the encroachments of modern civilization”. More recently, Hawley (1995, p. 315) wrote:

For Amish entrepreneurs, the ultimate entrepreneurial goal is not one of profit viability measured in monetary reward and prestige. Instead, it is one of maintaining cultural separateness and conducting their lives and business in a manner that values humility over pride.

Hawley (1995, pp. 320-1) elaborated:

... many Amish businesses are family owned and operated. For them, the concept of “human resources” hardly goes beyond concerns over family affairs ... Amish businesses are almost exclusively sole proprietorships, and for those who are not, partnerships between fellow church members are formed. Although many would realize tax and legal benefits by incorporation, such legal manoeuvring continues to be viewed by the Amish as antagonistic to their definition of Amish-ness.

All of the above is still true today. An interviewee explained to the author, “We keep choosing humility and simplicity as a way of life”.

Changes are occurring nevertheless. Hawley (1995, p. 320) observed:

Amish entrepreneurs tend to cluster heavily in certain small business ventures. This phenomenon can best be described by order of the *Ordnung*, which requires that the Amish establish only those stores and small businesses that meet the product and service needs of the Amish community.

Today, some Amish enterprises cater primarily to customers outside Amish communities. This is due to the fact that there are more Amish people wishing to live in Lancaster County, than there is space for them to have farms. Thus, it is no longer possible for all the Amish to rely on farming as a means of livelihood. The population of Lancaster County has been rising, while total farming acreage has been falling. Hence, the Amish of Lancaster County have begun to feel the need for non-farm employment, and this has prompted them to create a variety of new ventures,

from micro-enterprises producing preserves to larger firms that produce furniture for export.

Religion is an element of social capital and Borjas (1992) stated that segregation from a host society helps a community retain this capital. Amish people are participating in the global economy and the outside world is penetrating Amish territory. Yet, increased economic integration does not appear to be bringing a significant departure from traditional values. The Amish continue to exhibit a propensity for entrepreneurial behaviour, their society is self-sustaining, with virtually no unemployment and their membership is growing.

Notes

1. The Amish call themselves “the Plain People,” to distinguish themselves from their host society, which they refer to as “English,” “fancy people,” or “white folk.”
2. Although this was not a focus of the research leading to this paper, Amish quilts have been well-documented; see, for example, Hawley (2005).

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