Amish

Capsule Summary

Location: United States and Canada
Total Population: over 150,000
Languages: Pennsylvania Dutch, High German, English
Religion: Protestant

The Old Order Amish are an Anabaptist religious isolate. There are currently over 150,000 Old Order Amish living in over 200 settlements in over 20 states of the United States and one Canadian province (Ontario). However, about three-quarters of all Amish live in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. The Old Order Amish speak Pennsylvania Dutch within their group, use High German in their church services, and are generally fluent in English.

History

The Amish came into existence when some Mennonites, under the leadership of Jacob Ammann, separated from the Mennonite church in 1693 primarily because, unlike other Mennonites, they believed in a strict adherence to the doctrine of meidung, or a total shunning of excommunicated church members. The Amish resided throughout the German-speaking parts of Europe. Due to severe persecution, some Amish migrated to North America between about 1727 and 1860. There are no longer any Amish in Europe.

Amish who felt that the Amish church was becoming too liberal split off from the more liberal majority in 1865. This offshoot minority (consisting of about one-third of all Amish) was given the name Old Order Amish at this time, in recognition of the fact that they wished to retain the old Ordnung (order of behavior), or set of orally transmitted rules which govern the behavior of the Amish.

Old Order Amish Society

The primary unit of organization for the Old Order Amish is the congregation, which consists of an average of 30 households with about 150 people living in a church district. The term settlement is used to describe a group of congregations located within the same geographic region which have reasonably similar Ordnungs. There is no higher level of church organization above the congregation.

The congregation is led by a bishop, with the assistance of two to three ministers (who are chosen by lot) and one deacon. Bishops are chosen by lot from the group of ministers. Bi-weekly worship services are held in homes. Each church district has its own Ordnung, which they reaffirm twice a year during communion. The Ordnung consists of both rules that are common to all Old Order Amish and rules that are specific to each congregation. If a member consistently violates the rules of the Ordnung, a hierarchy of responses is initiated, with the highest level of response being excommunication in association with meidung. At the most extreme, meidung requires all members of the congregation (and by extension all Amish) to have absolutely no contact with the shunned individual. However, any shunned person who repents is reincorporated into the community. The severity of the meidung has been decreasing in recent years.

The importance of religion in Amish life cannot be overstated; it is embedded in every aspect of Amish life. Phrased differently, a distinction between religious and nonreligious affairs is meaningless for the Amish. Amish life is guided by several key principles, including adult baptism; Gelassenheit, or acting with humility and simplicity at all times; a belief that true grace can only be achieved if one lives in isolation from the world; a belief in absolute nonviolence; and a belief that states have no authority in religious matters. Separation from the world is fostered by the utilization of distinctive symbols, such as sixteenth century European peasant clothing, horse and buggy travel, and rejection of electricity from power lines. It is also recognized that separation from the world requires the existence of strong community ties and, in particular, in providing each other with assistance when needed. One of the better known examples of mutual aid is a communal barn raising but, in fact, mutual aid is involved in virtually all aspects of daily life.

The Old Order Amish are often thought of as a static society living the lifestyle of seventeenth or eighteenth century farmers. They are in fact a dynamic society, with a history of selectively incorporating new components,
particularly technology which is essential for economic competitiveness, into their cultural system. However, the Amish are selective, refusing to accept anything that they feel might threaten their core beliefs. As one example of the dynamic nature of their society, the Old Order Amish have been undergoing a transition over the past 40 to 50 years from an economic system based primarily on small family-owned farms to one based on wage labor. This transition appears to be primarily due to the joint effects of a rapid rate of population increase in conjunction with an increase in the cost of farm land in the vicinity of the major settlements. The magnitude of this transition varies substantially between settlements. Some Amish wage laborers work primarily with other Amish men, either in Amish-owned shops or in Amish construction crews, but an increasing number of men now work in factories where they have intensive contact with the non-Amish (variously referred to by the Amish as “Yankees” or “English”).

Although some Amish have practiced civil disobedience while protesting government policies that they felt infringed on their religious beliefs (such as the military draft), they are otherwise law-abiding citizens. They can be exempt from social security taxes if they are self-employed or work for an Amish employer but otherwise pay the same taxes as all other citizens.

Amish children attend school through the eighth grade. Amish maintain their own schools, but families may choose whether to send their children to public or Amish school. Upon completing school, all boys and many girls enter the workforce. Boys with fathers who farm will often assist with farm work but many boys now work in Amish shops or construction crews. Girls generally work as domestics, in both Amish and non-Amish homes. Sometime in their late teens to early twenties, Amish youth must decide if they will join the Amish church. This is often a difficult time for parents and their children. Currently over 90 percent join the Amish church. Amish people usually marry in their early 20s, and divorce is strictly prohibited. Amish families have an average of 7–8 children.

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See also Christians 1: Overview

Further Reading
Igou, Brad, editor, The Amish in Their Own Words: Amish Writings from 25 Years of Family Life Magazine, Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999

Andhras

Capsule Summary
Location: Andhra Pradesh state, India
Total Population: approximately 65 million
Language: Telugu
Religion: Hinduism

down to the low-lying eastern coastal region where the Godavari and Krishna rivers empty into the Bay of Bengal. The Andhra people speak Telugu, the most prevalent members of the Dravidian language family and the official language of the state. Approximately 65 million Andhra people live in Andhra Pradesh, in addition to the Telugu speakers who live in the border areas of surrounding states. The largest Andhra community outside of India is found in Malaysia, where there are approximately 30,000 Telugu speakers.