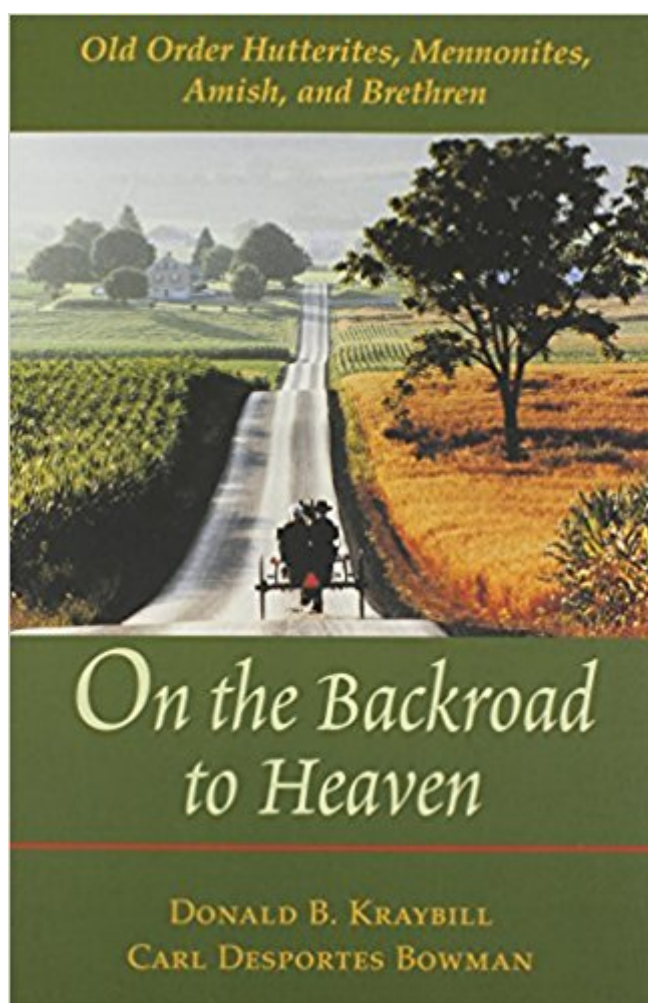


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# On The Backroad To Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, And Brethren (Center Books In Anabaptist Studies)



## Synopsis

On the Backroad to Heaven is a unique guide to the world of Old Order Anabaptist groups. Focusing on four Old Order communities—the Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren—Donald B. Kraybill and Carl Desportes Bowman provide a fascinating overview of their culture, growth, and distinctive way of life. Following a general introduction to Old Order culture, they show how each group uses a different strategy to create and sustain its identity. The Hutterites, for example, keep themselves geographically segregated from the larger society, whereas the Brethren interact more freely with it. The Amish and Mennonites are more alike in how they engage the outside world, adopting a complex but flexible strategy of compromise that produces an evolving canon of social and religious rules. This first comparative study sketches the differences as well as the common threads that bind these groups together.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Kraybill and Bowman, professors of sociology at Messiah College and Bridgewater College, respectively, take a typically sociological approach to Old Order Anabaptists. The authors attempt to explain how these groups, which are opposed to modern culture in so many ways, have been able not only to survive, but even to thrive. The Old Orders stress community, obedience and self-denial over individualism; they eschew "consumer consumption" (a rather unforgivably tautological phrase); and they question the value of formal education beyond a certain point, usually the eighth

grade. The authors deal cursorily with the history and demographics of the Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish and Brethren, devoting a chapter to each. These chapters include numerous graphs and charts and contain copious data, but they make for rather dry reading. The concluding chapters are the most interesting as the authors focus on the similarities, differences, structures and prospects of the traditions. Readers might be surprised to learn that the groups are actually quite diverse in terms of their acceptance and use of technology and in their relationships with the outside world. The authors are thorough in their analysis and offer cogent, if somewhat obvious, reasons for the continuing success of the Old Order traditions. Their approach is clearly sociological, so readers seeking a more historical perspective will want to look elsewhere. The book will be useful to libraries, undergraduates studying sociology of religion and general readers. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Kraybill (sociology and Anabaptist studies, Messiah Coll.; *The Riddle of Amish Culture*) and Bowman (sociology, Bridgewater Coll.; *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a Peculiar People*) examine the four major branches of "Old Order" religions in America and discuss their relationship with the larger culture. They present Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren in separate chapters, giving their history, present practices, and future prospects. The common features and differences of these related sects are clearly explained. An intriguing final chapter considers how these groups may fare in the increasingly postmodern world, which shares their skepticism with science and progress but repudiates all possibility of absolute truth. The authors give the general reader an excellent basic understanding of the beliefs and practices shared by all of these separatists while making the uniqueness of each group clear. One of the best single-volume works on this subject; highly recommended for academic and public libraries. C. Robert Nixon, M.L.S., Lafayette, IN Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

As a person always curious about lifestyles different from my seemingly mundane existence in suburban Melbourne, the Amish and Old Order Mennonites, with their resistance to technology and extremely gentle and peaceful beliefs, have always fascinated me. Although other books, such as the "People's Place" series, actually offer a good deal of useful information about specific topics relevant to the Old Order Anabaptist groups, "On the Backroad to Heaven" is the best general work I have read about them. It goes into very good detail into the character and nature of the Hutterites, Old Order Mennonites, Amish and Brethren, including all the aspects that are well-known but also

some of their rituals and methods of electing leaders that are little-known yet intriguing (e.g. the use of "lots"). More than that, "On the Backroad to Heaven" not only characterising them but also offering clear and easy-to-read comparisons. At the same time "On the Backroad to Heaven" shows not traces of trying to idealise these groups and expresses very clearly the problems they have coping with a modern world that is in many ways very hostile to the values they hold dearly. Its last part clearly shows how far removed they are from a "postmodern" culture, but yet shows what they have to offer thereto. On the whole, this is really good work. It is neither biased nor shallow, yet is extremely accessible. I would recommend it to anybody interested in cultural studies, even if not in Anabaptist groups.

The book does a good job of surveying the four groups, and finishes up very strongly when considering the similarities in the groups. The contrast between the Mennonites and Amish is also very interesting. It is also perhaps the most accurate portion of the book--although he picked some fairly liberal old order Mennonite groups to describe. It would have been a little better to have picked a more traditional Mennonite group. It is perhaps at its weakest when describing the old order German Baptist Brethren. There are some very embarrassing inaccuracies, including garbled German Baptist vocab (referring to family devotions as "taking the text"--a term that refers to the main sermon on Sunday for example) and considering certain very exceptional cases to be representative (a GB cheerleader, who he doesn't reveal had a parent outside the church). The glaring omission in the German Baptist section has to be that down to details such as order of worship and attitude they are extremely similar to the old order Amish--so much so that the two have cooperated on education in the past. I also found the section on gender strife among the Hutterites to be a little overstated. Hutterites wouldn't see the conflict the way Americans do, or the way the authors do. Enjoyed it a great deal.

I've only just begun reading this book, and already have learned so much that I never knew before! I can't wait to get to the rest of it. Since I live in an area supporting a high concentration of Amish folk, the information seems even more alive and relevant. For anyone interested in Old Order communities (Hutterites, Brethren, Amish, and Mennonites), this book is a wonderful overview. I highly recommend it!

Terrific book!

Very interesting.

I am Brethren and my family has a long history of being Brethren so this book helps me to know about some of my family history. Excellent book.

The author does a great job of breaking down differences and similarities between Anabaptist denominations. Plenty of actual anecdotes from Amish/ Mennonite newspapers and contributors. I hope that the publishers put out an updated version of this book at a later date.

This is a great book.

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