

Origin of the Amish and the Anabaptists: America's Strangest Religion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkJUOdBiCEQ>

Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/amish.pdf>

If you live in any of these countries here: Canada, the US, Mexico, Belize, Bolivia, or Paraguay, odds are good that your descendants one day might be living in a sea of horses, wagons and rugged quirky bearded men headed to town to sell their produce.

Most Americans are aware of the Amish, a strange albeit harmless bunch living out in the middle of wherever, doing their thing, shunning technology and sticking to themselves.

But could you have ever imagined that one day the Amish might become a very large minority, possibly even the majority of the country?

Okay, the latter seems unlikely, but let's go over why it's actually possible.

But first a brief history about our strange rural friends which stretches all the way back to the lowlands of the Netherlands, Germany and even Siberia.

Who are the Amish exactly? Are they an ethnic group, a religious group, hippies or all of the above except the last one, probably?

The Amish are part of a wider collection of churches known as the Anabaptists, originally a Protestant sect founded in the 16th century in what is now Germany and the Netherlands, with radical ideas of reforming what they knew about the Bible, their lifestyle and culture.

They quickly distinguished themselves for their interpretation of Christianity, generally forbidding its members to take part in politics or government affairs and forming tight-knit units with very strict lifestyles to say the least.

Because of this, many early Anabaptists were persecuted throughout Europe, leading many to flee to other usually more sparsely populated parts of the continent, which eventually led to a large exodus of Anabaptists into Russia and joined by millions of other German immigrants.

An early split in the church led to the formation of a handful of different sects including the Amish who were mainly from central Germany and the Netherlands, speaking a high German Franconian dialect, the Mennonites mostly from Northern Germany and the Netherlands speaking a low German dialect and the Hutterites, mainly from Southern Germany, like Bavaria, and also speaking a high German dialect.

Keep in mind this was before the standardization of the German language and hence the languages spoken by these communities only have a limited degree of intelligibility with other Germanic varieties and definitely stand out.

Life in Europe was not kind to many of the Anabaptists, faced with violence from neighboring communities and the near state of constant warfare on the continent, many began to see the New World as an outlet for a new life.

And they certainly took advantage of this opportunity with the first Anabaptist settlement being established in North America in the early 1700s when the area was still a British colony.

And the Amish typically settled in frontier regions with occasional clashes with local Native American tribes.

Up until the 1800s, due to high rates of disease and premature death, the Amish community numbered no more than a thousand people, generally sticking to their own communities, refusing to take part in what they saw as petty worldly squabbles such as the American Revolution or the war of 1812, although the British did attempt to conscript their young men for battle.

Like much of the frontier at this time, conditions were absolutely brutal with life expectancy for the group hovering somewhere around 25 due to high infant mortality and disease.

But the community pushed on, other German migrants from the same region also settled in the areas of Pennsylvania and Virginia, but did not identify with the Amish or their lifestyle, and would eventually become assimilated into American society.

But their language does live on to a certain extent.

You might know it as Pennsylvania Dutch, again a high German dialect, not to be confused with the actual Dutch language from the Netherlands.

A separate group of Anabaptists, the Mennonites also began to pour into Canada during this time, mainly from Russia and hence are sometimes referred to as Russian Mennonites, although this is slightly misleading as they are not of the Russian ethnicity.

It wasn't until the advent of modern medicine and scientific breakthroughs of the late 18th century that finally allowed the Amish communities to have some level of growth and prosperity.

Although [they were] still largely segregated from the rest of American society.

Time flew by and with the advent of automobiles, telegraphs, electrical grids, indoor plumbing, the internet, smartphones, and video games the Amish have stood fast and rejected them all and the rest is history.

To this day, they are still a rather small ethno-religious community making up no more than one percent of the population of any state and only 0.1 percent of the country's population as a whole, but it doesn't end there.

Large groups of Mennonites in both the US and Canada would actually go on to establish colonies in other parts of the Americas, such as in Mexico, Belize and South America.

Due to the high growth rate and insular nature of the Anabaptist communities, these would quickly grow to eclipse even the original populations that birthed them as there are now over 100,000 Mennonites in Mexico mainly in the northern state of Chihuahua, making up around three percent of the population, easily larger than the proportion of Amish in any US state.

In Belize, the Mennonites are an important minority who play a crucial role in the Belizean economy and more recent settlements in the jungles of Bolivia and Paraguay are fast becoming some of the most fascinating examples of insular ethnic communities, although many Mennonite communities are bilingual in Spanish and have some degree of integration in the country.

Also important to note, the Amish are generally much stricter than their Mennonite cousins who are often allowed certain modern amenities to an extent, although this can vary from community to community.

Judging by current growth rates of around three to five percent a year, compared to a growth rate of only 0.6 percent a year for the United States as a whole, the Amish population doubles around every two decades, going from 128,000 in 1990 to 360,000 today.

But interestingly, the Amish generally do not stay in just one area, as they have been periodically expanding westward as their population climbs.

This is a rather bizarre parallel to the initial settlement of the United States by Europeans in the first place, with the Amish essentially spreading out to colonize new regions of the country and living a lifestyle that is not too dissimilar to the American pioneers [from] hundreds of years ago.

As an example of this, in 1990 only 2,000 Amish lived in Kentucky, today it's around 15,000.

Even a state like Maine which has traditionally had zero Amish presence up until 2010, now has an Amish population of over a thousand.

Chances are that an Amish village might be established in a rural countryside near you, [thus] bucking the trend of rural exodus in America, and defying the social norms and cultural expectations of the rest of society.

However [the] flipside to this [is that] there is quite a high rate of apostasy within the Amish community with around 20 to 30 percent of those born into the community leaving the traditional lifestyle.

But that's still not enough to put a damper on their population boom.

In Latin America, the population growth for some communities is even more extreme, with the Bolivian Mennonite community growing from 20,000 in 1990 to over a hundred and fifty thousand today, a growth rate of about seven percent per year.

This is a growth rate twice as high as the most rapidly growing country in the world today, Niger in West Africa.

It would seem that when the Bible said to be "fruitful and multiply", the Anabaptists really took it seriously.

Although no rules in this church exist barring outsiders from becoming a part of the community in the United States, this is exceedingly rare.

But missionaries have established quite large flocks of local converts in Africa, particularly Ethiopia and South Africa, now numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

In this regard, Anabaptists are somewhat similar to the Mormons, another semi-ethno-religious community that was founded with an endogamous core community that has contracted due to those leaving the faith but regularly supplanted with new converts from outside the traditional core.

The number of Amish converts in America is very small, likely only a few hundred people at present.

However, in Latin American countries, there is substantial growth of converts such as in Belize, where around 80 percent are ethnically German, but the remaining 20 are converts from the Creole, Mayan and Mestizo locals, with views on inter-marriage varying from place to place.

So at six or seven children on average for the typical Anabaptist family, and a very low infant mortality rate thanks to modern medicine, it would appear that nothing can stop the expansion of this group of people living the old lifestyle from eventually dominating the entire Western Hemisphere.

Or will they? It is true that the Amish in the United States are currently growing at a ludicrous pace [and are] expected to hit one million people in only three decades.

And by the end of the century they're projected to make up around two percent of the USA's population while everyone else is plugging themselves into virtual reality machines and flying around in hovercrafts if current growth rates continue.

But that's the thing only if current growth rates continue.

Indeed, if the current average growth rate of approximately 3.7 per year continues for the Amish community in the United States they would become the majority of the population in 220 years.

Eventually, theoretically speaking, even the majority of the population of the entire world, if you waited long enough.

In Bolivia, due to the rapid growth of the Mennonites in their country, even if we go with the slow rate of growth of four percent, they would make up the majority of the country by 2140.

Pennsylvania would be majority Amish in 110 years, Ohio in 120 and even the crown jewel of America, New York State itself, would have covered wagons strolling through Central Park in a century from now.

This all seems highly unlikely to be the case, as there has been a dip in the Amish fertility rate in step with the decline of the general American fertility rate since the 1960s.

Although nowhere near as extreme since it was already so high to begin with.

It's going to either take extreme cultural changes in the Anabaptist communities or government interference in order to curb this rapid population growth, and hence I have a few theories.

Either A) the entire church will eventually modernize to some extent and connect to the larger culture of the United States, which would see a precipitous drop in their fertility.

Or B) the fertility rates will naturally drop as areas of settlement reach their carrying capacity, unlikely to occur for at least another hundred years.

Or C) governments put some sort of artificial cap on the number of children per family, similar to what China did in the late 19th century, although we all know that didn't turn out so well for them.

Or D) the governments or society as a whole will attempt to attract the younger members of the Amish community into the wider society, which does already happen in about 25 percent of cases.

I mean just how long can they resist the wonders the modern world has to offer?

So let's wait and see. Maybe one day your local football stadium will be demolished and replaced by a massive farm and stables.

Separate roads will be constructed in major cities to accommodate horses, revealing your ankles in public will be made illegal, you'll have to sell your car and buy a horse just to keep up with the times. You can't afford gas anymore because no one's digging it up.

Perhaps the UN will send the Amish to other planets, colonized because they're becoming too overcrowded.

What a bizarre future indeed.

So please ,let me know your thoughts on the Amish the Mennonites and other Anabaptists who are defined not only by their interesting history but also their non-conformist lifestyles and attitudes in the face of so much pressure to assimilate to our modern world.

Thanks so much for watching everyone and I'll see you next time and the time after that and the time after that, all until the day the internet dies in the far future because the Amish choose not to use it.