

Saints and sinners: Rev engines for ‘Hour of Power’

His first congregation was composed of 75 automobiles. The church ad that week in the Orange County, Calif., newspaper was a teaser. “Everyone who comes will have a soft, upholstered seat by an open window,” the ad read. It didn’t mention that the comfortable seat would be the one in your own car or that the pulpit was the sticky tarpaper roof on top of the refreshment stand at the drive-in theater near the Santa Ana freeway. The year was 1955, and the Rev. Robert Schuller was 29. Today, at 75, Schuller no longer has to tease to get people to come to church. He long ago climbed down from his rooftop pulpit on the drive-in’s refreshment stand - for which he paid a weekly rental of \$10. He now preaches from the \$25 million all-glass Crystal Cathedral,

which can be seen from the top of the Matterhorn ride in Disneyland three miles away. Although 1,800 people can sit inside the cathedral, Schuller has kept the drive-in concept that started him on his successful ministry. Hundreds sit in their cars in a parking lot adjacent to the church and hear the service on their car radios. Millions more tune in to the cathedral’s “Hour of Power” on TV. Schuller still considers the parking lot to be one of the keys to the church’s growth. He says that when his church increased its parking from 700 spaces to 1,400 spaces at a time when 700 was “adequate,” attendance rose astronomically. “‘Adequate’ parking space means room for everybody’s cars if you squeeze and maneuver



george plagenz

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and are ready to wait in line,” he says. “As modern Americans have become spoiled by easy parking at shopping centers, they have become more and more irritated by parking congestion they find at their churches.” Another of Schuller’s tips for ministers: Don’t be controversial on the pulpit. Controversy, says Schuller, should be handled in a classroom or small group setting where there

can be dialogue. He also quotes with favor the writer who says, “What distresses many middle-class churchgoing families is the feeling that the minister is so preoccupied with ‘the plight of distant people’ that he ignores the urgent personal problems of his own parishioners.” Schuller also believes ministers don’t pay enough attention to the unchurched. When he discovered there were 1,300 medical doctors living in Orange County, Calif., where his church is located, he invited the president of the American Medical Association to preach at his pulpit. Then he wrote a letter to all the doctors in the community, inviting them to hear the AMA president. Many came. Schuller is also critical of sermon titles he

believes are directed at religious people. An example of a good sermon title: “How to Make a Marriage Succeed.” He likes it because it sounds as if it is an article from a secular magazine, “but you can put plenty of the Bible and Christ into it.” Schuller has his share of critics. He is accused of preaching a “smooth success line, a gospel to the white upper-middle classes.” Others charge him with being an admirer of “the beautiful, the successful and the fabulously wealthy.” “It makes one wonder,” says one critic, “did he ever hear of the Beatitudes?” Noting that Schuller is a member of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church, one writer remarks, “If Calvin were alive today, he would turn over in his grave.”

New study shows Amish groups thriving by keeping youth on the farm

By Jennifer Brown
Associated Press Writer
PHILADELPHIA — Amish communities and other isolated religious colonies are thriving by persuading their children to continue their largely preindustrial ways and remain with their churches, according to a new study. The Amish, the largest of four “Old Order” groups examined, keep more than 75 percent of their children in the fold, according to the study. Hutterites, the nation’s oldest rigidly communal Protestant order, persuade more than 95 percent of their young to remain in the large agricultural communes located mostly in the northwest-United States and western Canada. “Simply making babies will not ensure growth,” said Don Kraybill, co-author of the study. “Children must be persuaded to stay with the church as

adults. And the surprise is that they are.” Results from the 10-year study have been compiled in a book published this month, “On the Backroad to Heaven” (Johns Hopkins University Press). It is billed as one of the most extensive studies ever conducted of the Old Order religious groups. Kraybill, a sociologist at Messiah College in Pennsylvania and co-author Carl F. Bowman, a professor at Bridgewater College in Virginia, spent time living among the groups, attending worship services and working beside them in barns. The believers they studied were the Amish, Hutterites, Old Order Mennonites and strict Brethren. The first such groups settled in Pennsylvania in the early 1700s. These are traditionalist branches of a broader movement that traces its roots directly back to the Anabaptists of 16th century Europe.

The four Old Order groups make up a fifth of the 550,000 adults in the nation’s Anabaptist-related churches; the other four-fifths are Mennonites and Brethren who are largely indistinguishable from the rest of society. Like their cousins the Baptists, both the strict and modern groups baptize only youths and adults. But unlike Baptists, they are committed to pacifism and nonviolence, refusing to serve as police or soldiers. One reason for the Old Order groups’ success in retaining young members is that these religious communities have created an out-of-the-mainstream culture — with distinctive dress, customs and sometimes even language — which is difficult for children to escape. “It’s a real culture shock,” Kraybill said. “Leaving is not only hard because they would be so isolated from their parents, friends and family, it’s also like

a foreign country.” Except for the Brethren, all the groups studied speak a Germanic dialect for everyday life and in worship services. Except for the Brethren, children are separated from outsiders in private schools, which typically end after eighth grade. Amish youth must join the church before they can marry. Farmers pass down property to their children only if they remain in the church. In addition, all but the Brethren shun members who leave. Young people socialized into such a different cultural world “really have no other option,” an ex-Amishman was quoted as saying in Kraybill’s book. But to prosper, the Amish, Hutterites, Old Order Mennonites and Brethren have intertwined compromises with restrictions. They allow technology that furthers growth — modern medi-

cine, for example — while prohibiting that which they believe tears the groups apart — television, radios and most telephones. Sometimes, Kraybill said, those can appear conflicting to outsiders. “Each group draws a line in the cultural sand, and once drawn, it impacts future decisions,” the authors wrote. “Was it electricity, the car, or the telephone that would speed things up and usher worldly influences into the home?” For example, the Hutterites live in agricultural communes, with only the leaders having contact with outsiders. But they own million-dollar farms using CB radios, telephones and fiber-optic lines to boost productivity. The Old Order Mennonites allow tractors in the fields, but the machines must have steel wheels so they cannot be used for transportation on roads. The

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Saturday: Sabbath School: 9:30 am
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Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm
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Sunday: Sunday School: 8:45 am
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United Methodist Church
Brewster:
Pastor:
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Winona:
Minister: Rev. Bob Winters
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