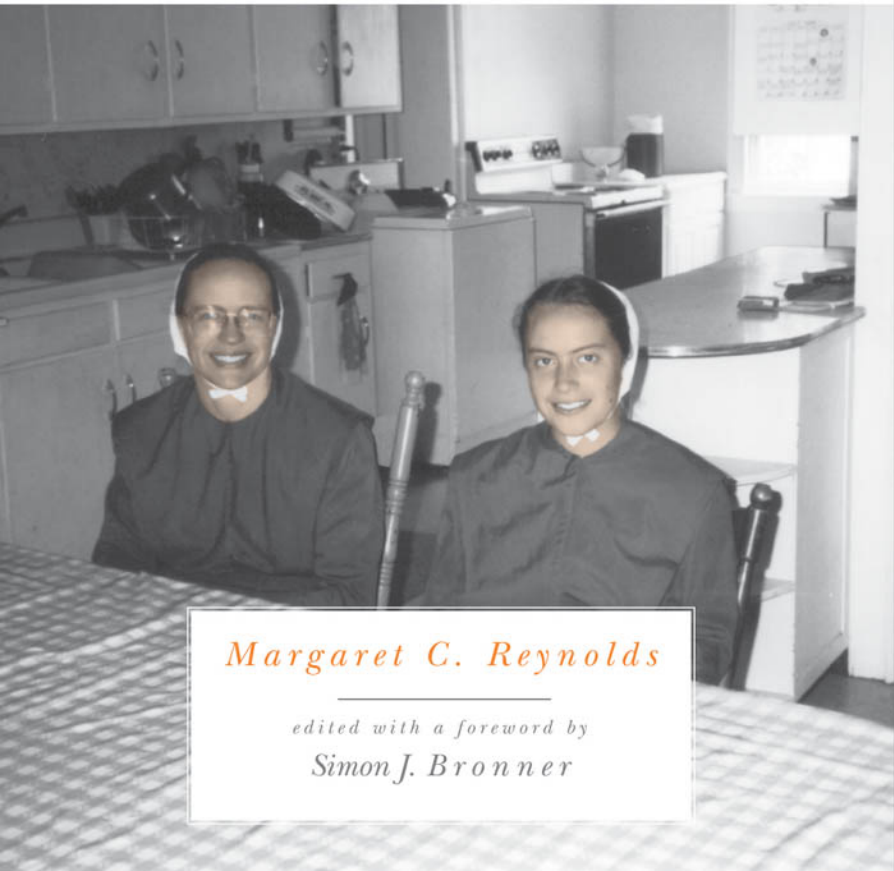
Plain Women

Gender and Ritual in the Old Order River Brethren



Margaret C. Reynolds

edited with a foreword by

Simon J. Bronner

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FOREWORD

Simon J. Bronner

The words "plain women" may elicit, for some, mental pictures of unattractive (or simply ordinary and toilworn) people. In our modern, industrialized society, the phrase commonly carries a negative connotation. But within segments of the society following the "old order" traditions of Anabaptism and Pietism, the words ring with compliment, describing followers of faith and community who live by gloried values of humility. A "plain woman" is likely to avow obedience to God and her husband as a cherished principle. She may well be a member of a group quite aware of its difference from the dominant society. That is not to say that matters of beauty do not count or that the self is totally sacrificed. So what exactly drives the group to take this less-traveled path, and how do its members—especially women—negotiate the gulf between their plain world and mass society?

Most of us will grope for an answer. We may look to the Amish, but in fact, we know far more about Amish men than Amish women. We should realize that a number of groups follow the plain path, and among them, the members of the Old Order River Brethren raise additional questions: their selective use of modern technology seems incongruous beside their extra-plain dress. Until now, the River Brethren experience has been obscured or neglected in historical and sociological annals. With this book, however, Margaret "Peggy" Reynolds has done a great service in illuminating their society and traditions through field observation of everyday life and rituals, interviews, and available historical documents.

Plain Women represents the first analytical field study of the Old Order River Brethren, a significant "plain" group born in the United States. (It is also one of the few available studies of Anabaptist women.) Despite their meager numbers, the River Brethren community has lasted over two hundred years. The River Brethren are worth knowing; their experiences may help all of us—plain or not—reflect on how communities of faith are formed

and maintained. The community has a fascinating pattern of dialogue with the "world" from which it wished to separate (and with other plain groups from which it sought distinction). Here, Peggy Reynolds has uncovered their customs, values, and beliefs, and she has asked the most basic question of all—what tradition means for individuals seeking belonging.

The special perspective that Peggy Reynolds brings to this work is through the lens of gender. She understood that most writers on Anabaptist and Pietistic groups were men, and she argued that they understated the significance of women's roles in the structure of plain society. Keenly and critically aware of her own role as a woman, wife, mother, and teacher brought up in Protestant theology, Peggy focused on what plain women did, and she listened attentively to what they had to say about themselves.

If you could ask Peggy about her sense of belonging, she would probably refer to the Pennsylvania German culture in which she was raised. But as a "modern" mother raising her daughters, she felt those traditions eroding, and she sought to recover the meaning of the transition to mass culture. Her consideration of herself and of the River Brethren echoes our questioning of identities as they are shaped by the multiple forces of gender, ethnicity, region, and family. Indeed, what does it mean to be different, to be separate, by faith and appearance? What does it mean to be faithful to tradition, to live in piety, or to be loyal to an intimate community in a society largely governed by mass culture?

Peggy Reynolds did not live to see this book published. She died, too young, in 1999 at the age of fifty-one. She had begun her work with the Old Order River Brethren a decade before, having undertaken the research for a doctoral dissertation in American Culture and Folklife for the Pennsylvania State University. I knew her work well as her adviser and dissertation director, and I know that she would want to acknowledge the counsel of her other committee members: John B. Frantz (History), Kenneth Thigpen (English and Comparative Literature), Gerald N. Knoppers (Religious Studies), and Joseph J. Kockelmans (Philosophy). The Publications Committee of the Pennsylvania German Society took notice of her groundbreaking work and recommended that it be revised for a wider audience. The committee asked me to edit the manuscript, and I gladly complied, because her topic surely deserves public notice.

Although not her first word in print, this book is her culminating piece of scholarship. Peggy had a sharp analytical mind and a great desire to "see things for herself"—an energy that she brought to her fieldwork and her

previous scholarly works. She wrote on Pennsylvania German architecture for *Pennsylvania Folklife* (1993) and received an award for the essay from the American Folklore Society. Turning to her community experience, she described "growing up United Brethren" for *Der Reggeboge: Journal of the Pennsylvania German Society* (1994). She also had material on Amish education, which she turned into a smart essay for the *Pennsylvania Journal of Teacher Leadership* (1996). Her focus on the analysis of gender was, in fact, in the vanguard of an unprecedented conference on women of Anabaptist traditions—a meeting appropriately entitled "The Quiet in the Land?"—held in 1995 at Millersville University.

I exercised considerable editorial license in preparing her manuscript for publication, including choosing a title for the book. I also took care to maintain a distinction between her historical narrative and her ethnographic observations and interviews. Chronicling the history and ethnography of the River Brethren implies different narrative "voices": I used the past tense to describe events occurring before Peggy's observation of the River Brethren began, and I largely applied the present tense to her accounts of the practices and beliefs that she observed while she was "in the field." I also clarified her references to scholarly authorities as voices to be considered alongside the testimonies of the River Brethren. I consulted her husband, Lorin Reynolds, for additional materials she had compiled, and I checked my own library. I gathered comments from Donald Durnbaugh of Juniata College and from Carolyn Wenger, director of the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society; both are astute readers and well-versed in Brethren and Mennonite traditions. I also sought out Stephen Scott, an Old Order River Brethren member and an authority on plain groups, for his comments on the observations that Peggy made. He felt that she deserved credit for giving considerable space to the comments of River Brethren members, although he also noted that her interpretations were, indeed, her own—River Brethren community members would not necessarily agree with the conclusions that she, an informed outsider, had drawn. I therefore took on the task of separating her sociological and psychological analyses of the River Brethren from views expressed by the River Brethren themselves. As the study progressed—and as she acted more as a participant in River Brethren society—Peggy became increasingly sympathetic to River Brethren values, and she was especially respectful of their attitudes toward gender roles. But she still held feminist positions, and River Brethren women understood that she was not advocating their life choices. This book, then,

is ultimately a work from the perspective of the outside "world," even as it offers an unprecedented look at mass society from the eyes of the River Brethren.

Scott emphasized to me that the River Brethren who knew Peggy were fond of her. Her husband shared a touching note sent by the community upon her death: "We enjoyed having Peggy in our midst. It seems so sad to think that we are still here in life and health while she experienced severe health problems. Surely it is good for her to be with the Lord." Her husband remembered that "her study was not research but more a meeting of friends that allowed both sides insight and understanding." The acknowledgments in her dissertation reveal her feelings for the River Brethren: "Chiefly, I am indebted to the women and men of the Old Order River Brethren. My greatest admiration belongs to the women in this Old Order sectarian group, who demonstrated unselfconsciously their strength in submission, and who performed in unassuming, quiet ways essential traditions to preserve their River Brethren culture. They generously admitted me into the heart of their homes and the soul of their community."

Peggy would have wanted me to add her other acknowledgments, particularly to her family—husband Lorin and daughters Erin and Megan. She also extended her gratitude to Patty Duncan, Diane Wenger, and Tom Gallagher, fellow scholars in the field. She gave her thanks to Alan Mays and Fay Youngmark of the library at Penn State–Harrisburg.

I am grateful to her for setting out into the field to pursue a topic that needed such attention. She plowed exciting new scholarly ground and provided students with a valuable model of lifelong learning. She taught me much about tradition and community, and I am happy to be an instrument for bringing her work to others.

Introduction

Bearded elders issue a somber summons for the Old Order River Brethren congregation to gather for the baptismal ceremony. A hush settles over the throng as a young woman wades into waist-deep water, where, if she crouches, the water will cover her body to the neck. She turns around in the water to face the congregation, clinging to the arm of the minister for balance. Supported by his grip, the girl is immersed face-forward, three times in succession, as the minister reads the baptismal service. Water streaming from her hair, her head covering awry, and her long skirts clinging to her legs, she emerges and makes her way awkwardly up the embankment to her waiting parents. With tears, embraces, and whispered words, the parents wrap the young woman in a wool blanket, and she returns to her weeping, joyous family.[1]

An elderly man nearby identifies himself to me as a former member of the Old Order River Brethren. He leans toward me and whispers sadly, "So many of these young women are beginning to work outside the home. I don't believe the group will last another generation." I understand his viewpoint. The group is small, often confused with the Amish, and increasingly

surrounded by commercial and residential development. I am drawn to learn more about this small plain group as they struggle to maintain their values within the larger mass culture—and indeed to define their distinctiveness among other plain groups.

As I ask questions of the Old Order River Brethren, I am directed to women's traditions as a repeated reminder of the values and expectations central to the group. Food, dress, and especially ritual traditions, I learn, do more than *reflect* values. They are essential to *perpetuating* those values. They encode expected gender roles, social structures, and power relationships.

Over time, my questions evolved into a study of Old Order River Brethren women and the ways in which women's traditions preserve the community. This investigation was an outgrowth of previous work that I had done on Pennsylvania German traditions in central Pennsylvania. I had written a material culture study of the homesteads of a Pennsylvania German family for my master's thesis in American studies, and I was eager to explore other facets of Pennsylvania German tradition (Reynolds 1992). In that work, I recorded changes in the family's design and use of architecture over a hundred-year span as a sign of ethnic cultural weakening. Yet I could not generalize too much for the Pennsylvania German field from the study, since I realized that sectarian groups such as the Amish actively maintained continuity with the Pennsylvania German past. Indeed, the Pennsylvania German field often divides in just this way: the sectarian "plain Dutch" tend to attract contemporary sociological interest as an active set of groups, and the non-sectarian "fancy Dutch" draw more historical investigation as a fading regional-ethnic folk culture. Appreciating interdisciplinary approaches to American Studies (and thinking that the division in the Pennsylvania German field was often overstated), I sought to examine Pennsylvania German traditions as both history and sociology, religion and folk culture.

My topic arose unexpectedly as my husband and I strolled one summer morning through a noted Pennsylvania Dutch farmers' market located in Manheim Township, Lancaster County. My husband introduced me to James Dietrich, a man of small stature, dressed in plain clothes, with a full black beard. A member of the Old Order River Brethren, he was reserved and grave, yet friendly. He presented us to his daughter, a shy ten-year-old garbed in a quiet, plain-cut dress, her dark hair in long braids. We chatted briefly, and then bid them farewell. Afterward, it occurred to me that this

man might provide information that could lead to a research project on contemporary religious traditions among Pennsylvania Germans.

I contacted James Dietrich, and he invited me to a River Brethren wheat harvest meeting held July 6, 1992, in Silver Spring Township, Lancaster County. In the barn of Paul Schubauer, I was greeted and made welcome. This was to be the first of many encounters with the women and men of this sectarian group. Learning of my scholarly interest in the group, one sister enthusiastically exclaimed that I might enjoy attending the breadmaking service at the September love feast, a communion and footwashing celebration. As she described this exclusive women's ritual, my excitement mounted. This was a ritual unheard of in other sectarian Old Order groups, and I was certain that it was unique to the Old Order River Brethren.

My project evolved into an unanticipated study of the role of women and their religious traditions in this little-known plain community. I sought answers to questions I considered of social significance—such as "Why does this group have a women's ritual?"—and to larger questions, such as "What is the significance and meaning of plainness for this group within Pennsylvania German history and culture?" As I became more involved with the group, my data grew and my questions multiplied.

My background was germane to the study. I had been a member of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ during my childhood, and as a young adult, I attended a Church of the Brethren college, where I absorbed Brethren influences and learned about Brethren and Mennonite Anabaptist origins and their hallmarks of nonresistance and separation. I understood the values of pietistic, German-Protestant plainness. And in Old Order River Brethren worship, I heard echoes of the Pennsylvania German revivalist religion in which I had been immersed. The higher spiritual pitch of River Brethren meetings (compared with Mennonite and Amish services) originated in the melding of the United Brethren and pietistic traditions. And in the solo testimonies of women and men, lay exhortation, and Bible reading, Old Order River Brethren still practiced the spiritual legacy of the United Brethren founders—a legacy long faded from my current religious experience.

Awareness of my own role as a submissive woman growing up in a patriarchal, ardently religious household shaped my perceptions of the cultural roles of Old Order River Brethren women. Reciprocally, the traditional vision of women among the Old Order River Brethren—as nurturers,

mothers, wives, and helpmates—fixed these women's perceptions of me. They exhibited a lively curiosity about me and the details of my domestic life (which, shared with them, served to bond us). We found that we had a great deal in common: though reared and living in different societies, we (as women) lived under similar cultural and religious circumstances. I do not accept the choices of Old Order River Brethren women, who value physical work, community, and family above the development of individualism. But in the process of working with the River Brethren, I acquired a sincere respect for the women's heroic patience and their dedication to the idea of submission as a religious value. In this study, I have not lost my values as an analyst from "the world" (as the River Brethren call it), and yet I have tried to tell their fascinating story as they relate and understand it.

Native and Scholarly Terms

To show potential differences between the two ways in which I treat the Old Order River Brethren in this study, I need to discuss some key terms from both native and analytical perspectives. I often refer to terms that the River Brethren themselves use. When I interpret the traditions of the group for my analysis, however, I use terms imposed from scholarship that deals with religious groups more generally.

To determine the meaning of terms from inside the group, I relied on Senior Deacon John Snyder, who is greatly respected among the Old Order River Brethren (J. Snyder 1996). I begin our interview with questions about how River Brethren refer to themselves. He observes that in central Pennsylvania, the "Horse and Buggy" Group (now fewer than twenty in number), the Horst Group, and the United Group do not share fellowship. Nonetheless, they all call themselves River Brethren. And among the Old Order River Brethren in Lancaster County, women refer to the group as the "Brethren," meaning both men and women in the collective, or they simply allude to the "church." Men who write or talk about the church refer to the "brotherhood," a term used when addressing outsiders about the group. Following their usage, I direct attention interchangeably to the "Old Order River Brethren" or the "River Brethren" to designate this group.

While we sit at his kitchen table and I prepare my questions, Deacon Snyder challenges the common analytical terms I draw from sociology to describe the River Brethren. He politely explains the "native" keywords he and his community tend to use. Deacon Snyder's speech is liberally sprinkled with references to the River Brethren as "the group." He points out, "When I say 'group' that would mean our complete fellowship. Ohio, Indiana—just a couple of families there—Iowa, Franklin, and Lancaster County." I make a mental note that River Brethren call attention to specific families or kin groups in definite geographic locations, as well as to themselves as a group united by theological similarities.

I, too, refer to the River Brethren as a *group,* but in the scholarly sense, as an ethnic group. River Brethren do not call themselves *ethnic,* but I use the expression to represent their shared subhistory within a larger society (Oring 1986:24). Ethnicity is usually associated with national ancestry, and the religion of the Old Order River Brethren derives from the experiences of the Swiss-German Anabaptists who were persecuted and who migrated to America to preserve their beliefs. River Brethren descendants perpetuated the memory of this experience in the belief system itself, creating a sense of ethnic identification based on lineage, national origin, and shared faith.

Sectarian is not a word that the River Brethren use to refer to themselves. *Sect* usually connotes a group deviating and living apart from a larger, generally accepted religious tradition; the group tends to be excessively devoted to a specific doctrine or doctrinal leader. I use *sect* as an analytical category to compare the River Brethren to other, similar groups. In the context of European Mennonism as a historic counterculture rooted in the doctrines of Menno Simons (a counterculture from which the River Brethren emerged in the New World), sect is a reliable term for these and other Anabaptist Christian groups. The sectarian model lends itself to a historical and religious analysis of River Brethren, Old Order Amish, Old Order Mennonites, and other plain groups (Hostetler 1980:8).

When I refer to *Old Orders,* I utilize Beulah S. Hostetler's description of these groups as "rejecting accommodation to new modes which they perceived as threatening to their beliefs and values" (Hostetler 1992:5). Common issues for these Old Orders were the rejection of meetinghouses and an approach to religion as a total formula for living. Old Order River Brethren believe, as do other groups usually classified as sects, that unrestricted cultural change will dissolve their community (Redekop 1969:232).

Loss of ethnicity and changes in lifestyle imperil the group, so they retain their sectarian traditions and psychological boundaries—sometimes in unexpected ways, as I was to discover.

I offer an opening for the deacon to discuss the term *sectarian*. "When scholars talk about the Amish," I interject, "they refer to it as a sectarian group." Snyder replies, "This isn't a common language among us," and he conjectures that it probably is not a common term among the Amish either. When I ask if he refers to himself as a member of a religion or a church, he answers, "We would say a group of fellow Christians, I guess, . . . as *brethren* in Christ." Goodnaturedly, Brother Snyder gives a gentle prod, a play on words, since the "Brethren in Christ" are an offshoot of the River Brethren, whom the Old Order would presumably consider an organized church. Snyder explains that River Brethren consider themselves a church, but not in the sense of an organized, denominational religion: "That's our religion, yes. But it's not based on being Old Order River Brethren. It's based on the fundamental principles of the doctrine of Christ. You know, when you're out driving, you may say, 'Oh there's the Church of the Holy Spirit, well that's what I belong to . . . or the Latter Day Saints, well I hope I'm one of them. . . . Am I a Jehovah's Witness? Yes, I hope I'm one of them'" (J. Snyder 1996).

I recalled that another member, Stephen Scott—an Old Order River Brethren writer and a scholar of plain groups generally—had identified the River Brethren as one of the smallest of the *plain* groups that believe in separation from "the world" through dress, transportation, and other facets of daily presentation (Scott 1978:13). At bottom, the plain worldview embraces simplicity in all aspects of life. Members of plain groups often use four categories to define their plainness: (1) rural orientation, (2) symbolic dress, (3) modes of transportation, and (4) separation from the world through symbolic and physical boundaries. Yet the example of the River Brethren, who accept selective uses of technology, brings into question the characteristics usually linked to plainness on the Old Order continuum.

In the course of our kitchen talk, Snyder reveals that for the River Brethren, the terms *tradition* and *orthodoxy* are synonymous. When we discuss the River Brethren's view of themselves as belonging to the brotherhood of Christians, the notion of orthodoxy emerges. In his father's day, John muses, the seat of orthodoxy was York County. "It seemed that they went—I don't know—too far to the left or the right—so that York County seemed to be the seat of traditionalism. Or in Lancaster County there was

more spiritual depth. . . . That brought dissension between people that saw the need . . . to warn of 'deadness' in the church" (J. Snyder 1996).

River Brethren often cite sages of the historic church, and Snyder quotes another, an older bishop "back further yet" who said, "True Christians are scarce as white crows." He uses this comparison to point out that orthodoxy in outward forms sometimes gets in the way of true Christian practice and creates tensions within the brotherhood. Brother Snyder offers an example that illustrates this tension between Franklin County traditionalists and less conservative Lancaster County members. A few of the Horse and Buggy Group tend to greet members of the United Group with the holy kiss, while their more orthodox members, he relates, "gave a stiff hand."

Intrigued by his interpretation of tradition, I press further about its meaning, and Snyder explains,

> Tradition is, "This is the way we always done it, and we'll continue to do it that way. There's so many things that we are bound to, and we always done it that way, and we always should do it that way." It depends whether we build our religion on outward things, . . . or a work of grace in the heart. . . . Some people live on what they *don't* do: you don't do this, you don't do that, you don't smoke, you don't drink, you don't chew, you don't go to movies. . . . So they're living on that. "I didn't do this, I didn't do that," but what *did* they do that they might live in Christ? (J. Snyder 1996)

In contrast to definitions of traditionalism embraced by the group, this study frequently employs the terms *folklore* and *folklife* (which are based upon the concept of traditions binding a community) to describe the approach I take in interpreting Old Order River Brethren culture. Folklore and folklife are related; usually, folklore connotes the expressive forms of tradition, while folklife refers to ways of living and working that are socially shared. "Folk" points to a kind of learning often suggested by tradition. Traditional learning implies knowledge passed on from one person to another by spoken word or customary usage.

My academic view of the term *culture* differs from that of the River Brethren as well. My scholarly sense of culture includes the distinctive way of living and the customary expressive forms of this religious group. For example, I examine the processes of ritual, dress, custom, and worldview of the Old Order River Brethren, particularly of the women. I consider culture

a broad process, one involving the ways that shared traditions among individuals form patterns that suggest a distinctive identity.

River Brethren, however, associate culture primarily with ethnic distinctiveness, embedded mainly in the visible symbol of dress, an outward form that often brings outsiders into the group. A River Brethren educator lamented to me that often people will join the group because they are attracted to the "culture," which he interpreted primarily as plain dress. These symbols of culture, he related with dismay, are merely superficial, and are not sufficient spiritually to hold a convert in the group. Since theoretical studies of culture are based upon designations of identity, I needed to resolve the use of this word in my study. I was careful to note when River Brethren used "culture" to designate outward forms, and when I used "culture" to refer to their way of life transmitted from one generation to another.

As I spoke with Brother Snyder, I contemplated whether the Brethren view their community in the way that sociologists understand the concept of *community* among the Amish—as "surrendered members" who emphasize sacrificial suffering, obedience to the collective, submission of individualism and self-interest, humility, brotherly love, and nonresistance (Hostetler 1980:22). To Brother John, the word "community" seems to imply something slightly different, a physical gathering of believers. "We refer to it [community] as 'meetings,' which is our common terminology. It can be termed as an 'assembly,' and I do know that in our '69 merger, the older bishop at that time used to refer to it as a 'waiting.' . . . And that seemed so strange to me, you know, a 'waiting.' But, I think that there is a basis for that, that we wait before the Lord. It's been referred to as a community of believers; it's a very fitting and proper word" (J. Snyder 1996).

My dialogue with Deacon Snyder further highlighted the distinctions between my scholarly view of the group and his native perception as a participant in the culture under observation. The Old Order River Brethren present a paradox to the researcher looking for a "native" perspective. River Brethren are not as consistently old-fashioned as one might anticipate (at least in a facile contrast of "traditional" and "modern"). Within their daily lives, these people use automobiles, electricity, computers, telephones, kitchen appliances, and an array of modern conveniences and technologies. In allowing ownership of modern material possessions, River Brethren members embrace the technology typical of most Americans.

Despite these manifestations of change, however, old-fashioned ways associated with plain sects prevail in women's appearance, dress, religious practices, and personal behavior.

Into the Field

Few historical documents illuminate the history of the River Brethren. Much of the group's history consists of oral tradition passed on to members of subsequent generations. Primary sources are rare, partly because sect members negatively considered record keeping "proud." Old Order River Brethren usually do not document their own history and culture in writing, but they seem willing to allow someone else to do so. They are interested in people knowing about them, but the emphasis on humility prevents them from promoting themselves.

What I gained from an examination of extant historical documents is a picture of ordinary people who struggled to establish themselves as a separated remnant, as a distinctive religious group driven by its own conception of the community of faith in its personal relationship to God. Research into their historical background revealed the eclectic origins of River Brethren beliefs, theology, and practices among the religious groups of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania revivalism: groups such as the Mennonites, Brethren (Dunkers), and United Brethren in Christ contributed to River Brethren belief. Historical narratives in letters and diaries disclosed the sect's growth, consolidation, division, and schism, and they also demonstrated how developing technologies and social dynamics created further divisions. Finally, River Brethren history chronicled how the group overcame division among its own members to stand against threats to its existence. By selectively using technologies such as telephones, electricity, and automobiles, the group negotiated a delicate balance between being *in* the world but not being *of* it.

In addition to reviewing the "historical" past of the Old Order River Brethren, I examined their "ethnographic" present. *Ethnography* (1) frames cultural scenes for description, (2) records behaviors and verbal expressions as symbols of communication, (3) documents participants' understanding

of these performances, and (4) interprets the functions of these performances in comparison to other scenes and contextual information. Ethnography was especially important in analyzing the rituals of the Old Order River Brethren as symbolic behaviors through which their values were communicated. Since the discipline of folklife studies also considers nonverbal communicative performances, I made a point of examining Old Order River Brethren women's behavior in gesture. Speech, silence, gesture, and setting constitute a language that communicates group values and perpetuates group traditions. The cultural event of breadmaking, for example, is a basic unit of communication of values and beliefs; I use this event to describe and analyze symbolic behavior in the River Brethren community. The oral narratives offered by Brethren women also yielded a full description of their work as culture bearers for the Old Order River Brethren. In my written account, I synthesized the data of multiple texts: my fieldwork, audiotape transcriptions, notebooks, conversations, and observations of interaction among River Brethren women and men.

I often refer to *fieldwork* in my ethnographic writing. The term implies observation of an "other," with the observer stepping away from familiar surroundings. The ramifications of fieldwork for my study were these: (1) I could notice behaviors because of their difference from my experience, (2) I could observe behaviors in their "natural" setting, and (3) participants could explain their behaviors to me because of my status as a "familiar stranger." (The contradictions of this term point out my predicament as a fieldworker who was well known to these people, but could never be admitted wholly into the spiritual core of the culture.)

As a fieldworker studying the Old Order River Brethren, my tasks were to obtain entry into the group and to gain the trust and confidence of women and men by explaining my presence and purpose to them. I had to establish a basis of communication for the success of the investigation. To initiate my research, I sought what folklorists Robert A. Georges and Michael Owen Jones have referred to as *intermediaries,* or individuals who could facilitate my entry into the culture of this authoritarian group (Georges and Jones 1980:49). My first contact, James Dietrich, became an initial point of entry, a "gatekeeper" to the society and culture of the Old Order River Brethren. I subsequently selected two key male figures who functioned as unofficial spokesmen for the group—one a teacher at a local Mennonite high school, the other a writer about and promoter of the plain groups. I knew that if I could gain their confidence, I would find a general

acceptance among other members, since River Brethren men command the authority to lead the group and make decisions.

In addition, having subsequently made the acquaintance of several women, I found that certain women in select Old Order River Brethren families also have some measure of influence among other women in the group.[2] These women were considered prominent and well-informed people in the community. They articulated the faith, values, and worldview of the River Brethren.

I believe that these women were willing to reveal details of their private lives because I shared similar feminine roles with them, though we enacted them in profoundly different cultures. Though I was a stranger in their midst, my familiar roles—a mother and wife doing the same kinds of things for my family that these women did in their homes for their own families—facilitated the rapport between us. Often these women would question me about my experiences, about the age and number of my children, what my husband did for a living, and so on. By sharing these aspects of my personal life, I observed that the sisters seemed to confide in me more readily.

I protected the privacy of the women I interviewed by using a pseudonym to refer to each woman. Sisters signed a form that entitled them to anonymity as respondents and gave them the right to withdraw information as they wished. In listing my subjects as sources in this text, I identified them by age, interview dates, geographic locations, and fictitious names. I also allowed informants to examine my findings and comment on them.

In addition, I crafted a prepared set of questions to gather cultural data for each section of my ethnographic study—dress, foodways, and ritual—and selected an appropriate group of people to whom I would administer the protocol. The protocol helped define the limits for generalizing the findings (Marshall and Rossman 1989:537). I delimited my study to a particular region, the Lancaster County district of the Old Order River Brethren (about ninety members).[3] To focus my study, I sought a community of baptized River Brethren women eighteen years of age and older. From July 1992 to January 1996, I interviewed twenty-eight River Brethren women, most of whom were between the ages of eighteen and fifty, although a few were between fifty and ninety-five. During this period, I also engaged seven River Brethren men in interviews.

Seeking ways to gather data on the roles women played in this group, I investigated specific cultural scenes of Old Order River Brethren daily life and ritual life. These scenes were significant because they represented

women's traditions that marked what the group held essential and important to its identity. In addition to investigating the women's tradition of breadmaking, I researched other traditions of dress and foodgiving that Brethren women mentioned as being significant.

My interactions with River Brethren prompted me to reflect on some of the problems of conducting fieldwork in a plain society and on my relationship with the women whose cooperation I sought. Some years ago, folklorist Bruce Jackson raised a critical question relating to confidentiality that I have pondered in my own study. He asked, "What do you do . . . when, because of the trust you've developed or secrets you've kept, you learn things that can hurt people?" (Jackson 1987:64). I found that my greatest ethical concern as an investigator possessing privileged information was to protect respondents from hurt at all costs, for I had a moral responsibility to avoid altering the context of the group and to leave the field essentially as I found it. In telling their story, I strove to reveal nothing that would alter the relationships between the women or the delicate social balance of the group.

Among scholars, the demand for impartiality seems to be applied more stringently to those who study religious groups and beliefs, for the academy holds that believers cannot be impartial scholars of religious tradition (Hufford 1995:60). But David Hufford, a scholar of belief systems, has argued that without reference to ourselves as subjects, "our knowledge claims leave ourselves out of the discussion . . . suggesting facts that simply exist with no meaning. This is what objectivity has come to, description and analysis in which reference to the subject . . . is omitted. . . . If we obtain the appearance of objectivity by leaving ourselves out of our accounts, we simply leave subjective realities of our work uncontrolled" (Hufford 1995:58).

By allowing the women to elaborate on my questions, permitting them the latitude to determine the flow of the interview, I tried to let them structure the conversation. I hoped that the women's voices unfolded their experiences as they lived them, not as I discerned them. They are as aware as I am of stereotypes (generated by the tourist industry) of plain women as blindly submissive to men, of plain community members as naive and backward. I owe the River Brethren women for taking the time to articulate their rationale, typically biblical, for their practices, the basis of their beliefs, and the foundation of their society. As an analyst, I saw some patterns they did not—and some meanings they might even deny. I had ideas about the cultural symbolism and psychological functions of their customs that were outside of their awareness or went well beyond the literal biblical

interpretations upon which they insisted. In those cases, I identify interpretations as mine. My overall concern in my approach to the River Brethren is to hypothesize the cultural significance of gender roles and rituals and to show that they are more central to the maintenance of plain society than has been acknowledged in scholarship. Another consequence of this study, I believe, will be to challenge stereotypes of plain women and to invite greater understanding of the complexity in and among plain groups. I hope to provide documentation of a little-known group and to raise questions about sectarian life in the United States today by examining a group other than the Amish (from whom many stereotypes and assumptions about sectarian life have been drawn).

Overview of the Book

The structure of this book moves from historical, religious, and sociological foundations of the River Brethren to considerations of their ethnographic present and women's roles and rituals within it. In the first chapter, I review the background of the River Brethren in order to explore the historical continuities and schisms of the group over two centuries and to frame its beliefs, traditions, and values in a social context. This chapter essentially raises the dual question of how members of the group as well as analysts view the identity of the Old Order River Brethren.

From a chronology of events reconstructed through documents and oral testimonies, I place the group in the context of its European Anabaptist origins. According to their sole published religious tract, the Old Order River Brethren define themselves and their religious tradition as Anabaptist in all "major doctrines." For the scholar as well as the River Brethren, Anabaptism is a reference to Brethren belief in voluntary adult baptism, separation of church and state, and separation from the values of the larger society (Hostetler 1993:27; Kraybill and Olshan 1994a:1). The group's inception in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania situates it among the myriad of sectarian splinter groups typical of colonial Pennsylvania. The historical and geographical contexts of the River Brethren have also had an impact on the community and its culture for over two hundred years—from its Swiss and German roots to its expression in Pennsylvania. Examining how

Old Order River Brethren fit into this background demonstrates how sectarian resistance to cultural change can result in schism, and it shows how interchanges with society alter the dynamic between the group and the host society and its technology.

Chapter 2 turns to present-day ethnographic observation. My rationale for beginning the ethnography with the expressiveness of plain garb is to highlight the bonds of cohesion between individual women that dress suggests. My examination of traditions of dress reveals how women maintain ethnic boundaries and change the details of plain dress. Women's narratives illustrate how dress constitutes a ritual of aging—and how women connect with each other through traditional dress for mutual support.

From dress as a ritual of aging, I make a transition in Chapter 3 to ordinary foodways and kitchen traditions, strategies in which women participate to maintain a broader sense of cohesion. I explain how kitchen traditions have the potential, in the private sphere, to create social connection—and, in the commercial sphere, to create discord in the community. Building on an analysis of the power of ordinary foodways and foodgiving as strategies to maintain the delicate balance of social avoidance and group exclusivity, I bring out, in the fourth chapter, women's use of sacred food and symbolic ritual behavior within the group's most significant religious ceremony. I dwell in particular on gender roles and symbolic behavior in the unique religious ritual of breadmaking, which explicitly relies on women's traditions to maintain community.

In sum, this study has specific and general goals. At the least, it brings into general awareness the distinctive traditions of the Old Order River Brethren as a pietistic plain group worthy of intellectual attention. A small American religious community with German roots, its story relates to a specific place—central Pennsylvania—and to Biblicist (i.e., based on literal interpretation of the Bible) values of tradition and separation challenged by the "modern" ways of mass culture. Within this framework, I look at the symbolism and function of plainness as they are perceived by members of a plain sect and by outsiders. More broadly, I raise questions about the significance of gender roles and ritual in the maintenance of a community of faith. I hope that this work will contribute to discussions of how varieties of small faith-based groups, or sects, join together in order to build a separate identity from—and negotiate their differences with—the dominant mass culture. And I am ultimately asking how these groups persist, resolutely, despite every expectation to the contrary.

Notes to the Introduction

1. Baptismal ceremony held September 3, 1995, on the farm of John Snyder, West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

2. Certain families who have been members for generations and who have distinguished themselves as especially orthodox take leadership roles in this group. They generally fill positions of authority, becoming ministers, deacons, and bishops, for example. I venture that some of this authority also stems from their success in business and their ability to manage financial resources.

3. The approximate total membership of the Old Order River Brethren comprises fewer than 350 souls, including those in the districts located in Iowa and in Franklin County, Pennsylvania.

1

"Be Ye Separate"

The History, Religion, and Society of the Old Order River Brethren

The Old Order River Brethren have neither systematically recorded their history nor kept archives to preserve historic documents. Members have primarily learned of their heritage from narratives in diaries and letters, from parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, and from oral accounts of church authorities. The collective memory of the Old Order River Brethren largely highlights its strict separation from other religious groups, its prominent leaders, the western migrations, and the distinct identity of the group over its two hundred years of growth and development. Besides relying on this oral tradition and some scattered documents available from the River Brethren, occasional accounts by outsiders refer to them. Here, I piece together the native and outside narratives to ask how a small group with a history of fragmentation remained intact over two hundred years. Out of what tradition did this group emerge, and how has it has stayed together for so long? My premise is that issues of leadership and personality created internal divisions that rent *and* reunited the River Brethren community of believers.

The theological roots of the River Brethren lie in the sixteenth-century Anabaptist Reformation of Switzerland, Holland, and German-speaking lands. The Swiss-German and Dutch Mennonites were their closest ecclesiastical relatives. These Anabaptists reacted not only against Catholicism but also against the Protestant Lutheran and Reformed state-sanctioned churches. Mennonite migrations to Pennsylvania launched the formation of the River Brethren, whose own tendency toward schism, migration, and fragmentation has continued in the United States over a period of 225 years.

Early-nineteenth-century River Brethren migrations, preindustrial growth, regionalism, and schism led to early-twentieth-century controversies over the inventions and conveniences of the "technological age." What held the River Brethren together was their decision to reunite and close ranks against mainstream Christianity and the modernism of twentieth-century America.

European Anabaptist Background and the Establishment of the River Brethren

The small Swiss-German River Brethren group was one of the earliest indigenous plain sects in North America. (By contrast, the Brethren [Dunkers], Mennonites, and Amish originated in Europe and migrated to the New World.) The River Brethren story commences with the Protestant Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in 1517. Luther, a Roman Catholic priest, rebelled against the Church of Rome because he believed that God's children received salvation as God's gift, not because of their good works.

In fact, Luther—and his successors—took exception to several Church doctrines. The Roman Catholic Church held the position that grace could only be received through a sacramental institution mediated by the priesthood (Bender 1944:33). The Church endorsed war as an instrument of state policy but employed it in religious conflicts as well. Moreover, Roman Catholicism held the optimistic view that the world could be redeemed.

Martin Luther, on the other hand, emphasized salvation by faith *alone*. According to Luther, Christians should encounter God without an earthly intermediary. He believed firmly in the "priesthood of all believers" (Bainton 1956:27). (To his fellow Germans, he also embodied the resentment

against papal control and taxation.) In Lutheran practice, the state dominated the church. The Lutheran Church compromised with civil authorities on military conscription, seeking the forgiveness of God while recognizing war as a worldly but necessary evil. It took a pessimistic view of mankind: denying the possibility of Christianizing the entire world, it still considered itself an instrument of God for the proclamation of the Divine Word.

Anabaptism carried the Reformed and Lutheran protests further: it refused to participate in the social order and separated church and state. In Harold S. Bender's classic essay, "The Anabaptist Vision," Anabaptism is defined as "the culmination of the Reformation, the fulfillment of the original vision of Luther and Zwingli, [which] thus makes it a consistent evangelical Protestantism seeking to recreate without compromising the original New Testament church, the vision of Christ and the apostles" (Bender 1944:13). Anabaptists embraced the concept of Christianity as discipleship and saw the church as a brotherhood with a new ethic of love and nonresistance (ibid., 20–21). Anabaptists rejected infant baptism, holding that the only valid baptism was that which followed a conscious decision, a "dying" to "the world" in Christ and a newness of life in regeneration (Bainton 1956:42).

Pietism and the Arrival of the Brethren in America

In Europe, the religious movement known as Pietism began in German-speaking and Dutch lands in the late seventeenth century. Pietistic leaders advocated a mystical religion of the heart, a striving for moral perfection, and an evangelistic fervor (Behney and Eller 1979:19–20). Pietists emphasized small groups (conventicles) formed for prayer, Bible study, and mutual aid. A highly subjective and individualistic emotional religious experience characterized the small conventicles. In their insistence on freedom of conscience, these groups became a threat to the temporal authority of the church and state alliance.

A major goal of Pietism was to leaven the formalism of the churches and to fill them with experiential believers. Pietists insisted on a personal, heartfelt relationship of the individual with God. The outward fruit of this relationship was to be a changed life, one that demonstrated Christian love and a practical Christianity. Pietists stressed prayer and Christian fellowship for mutual edification (Wittlinger 1978:8). Pietism successfully aroused the

"church people" (as others called the Lutherans and Reformed) and the European sectarian groups, both of whom subsequently transplanted the movement to the colonies.

Pietism affected many religious groups in colonial Pennsylvania, including the German Baptist Brethren, known after 1908 as the Church of the Brethren. Organized in Schwarzenau, Germany, in 1708 by Alexander Mack Sr., members were known as Dunkers, Dunkards, or Tunkers (from the German word *tunken* [to immerse]), since they believed in triple-immersion baptism. Carl Bowman, in *Brethren Society,* summarizes the early Brethren: "They adopted the view that the church was a gathered remnant of the faithful, called out from the world. It was neither a haven for sinners nor a sanctuary for those who were already saved, but rather a community within which Brethren worked together to deepen their salvation, through faithfulness, obedience, and mutual correction. A church-centered theology (neither Catholic nor Protestant) was embraced—unlike Protestants, the Brethren grounded authority more in the church than in the individual, but unlike Catholics, this authority issued from collective discernment rather than hierarchical position" (Bowman 1995:5–6). In 1719, after a dispute at Krefeld over the banning of a member who had married a Mennonite minister's daughter, Peter Becker brought to Pennsylvania a group of twenty families—the first Brethren to leave for America. Influenced by glowing reports from the relocated Brethren, Alexander Mack Sr. led a larger group of Brethren there in 1729. Virtually completing the transplantation of the Brethren from Europe, John Naas, another leader who had been deeply affected by the Krefeld controversy, sailed four years later with a group of Brethren to Philadelphia and settled in New Jersey (Bowman 1995:8–9).[1]

During the 1730s, early in the Dunker experience in America, Conrad Beissel split off and established the Ephrata Society, a pietistic religious commune that attracted some Lutheran and Reformed people (Alderfer 1985). Another pietistic group—the Moravians, led by Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf—began in 1741 to conduct ecumenical missions intended to draw converts from sectarian and church groups for a Pietist awakening in America. Their activities created resentment among many of these religious groups, which viewed them with suspicion (Frantz 1976:276–90). A number of church people agreed with John Philip Boehm, a Reformed minister at Falkner Swamp and itinerant minister to other churches, who held that one could not be both Moravian and Reformed (Frantz 1982:131).[2] Boehm was instrumental in defending the Reformed church

from the ecumenical Moravians (Frantz 1982:13). European churchmen sent reinforcements: Pietists Michael Schlatter and Henry Melchior Muhlenberg came to America to organize and evangelize the Reformed and Lutherans in the colonies. Subsequently, they, the Amish, Mennonites, Schwenkfelders, and Dunkers consolidated, closing ranks against the Moravian Pietists (Frantz 1976:286).

River Brethren Founders, 1770–1800

The eighteenth-century milieu of religious freedom and pluralism in Penn's colony brought forth religious questioning and experimentation, much of which took place on the frontiers during the political and religious ferment that characterized Pennsylvania during this period. Out of the experimental religious groups emerged Jacob Engel (1753–1832) and the River Brethren, a new religious society in the Pennsylvania wilderness and a prototype of New World hybridism in American culture and religion.

Jacob Engel's religious conversion paralleled the Pietist theme of crisis conversion, which all Pietists endorsed for genuine salvation. At the age of eighteen, Engel was "converted with a new experience," in which he embraced Mennonitism (Brechbill 1972:12). In River Brethren oral tradition, Engel is said to have converted others by preaching and exhorting, both near his home in Donegal, Lancaster County, and in travel farther afield.

Following his conversion experience, Engel became dissatisfied with his Mennonite baptism. Mennonites baptized by affusion, or pouring. Engel felt that the only true, scriptural way to baptize was by trine, or triple, immersion (in recognition of the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and face-forward, as John had baptized Jesus. ("Awakened" Christians in the eighteenth century were preoccupied by strict and literal interpretation of scriptural ordinances. Modes of baptism separated and divided many church groups, creating offshoot sectarian groups. New converts frequently denounced their parent churches for their perceived unscriptural practices, coldness, legalism, and lack of vitality.)

Jacob Engel separated from his Mennonite congregation, wishing only to be baptized in a scripturally correct mode. This sentiment eventually resulted in the formation of Engel's religious society, the River Brethren (Engle n.d.:61). He began to look to other religious leaders for spiritual guidance.

Image not available

Fig. 1 The River Brethren family tree, diagrammed by Stephen Scott, shows the relationships among the various groups with River Brethren background.

*Could also be called the Strickler-Keller-Musser Group; often referred to simply as the Strickler Group.

Given Engel's understanding of Christ's scriptural baptism as face-forward, trine immersion, he and the other dissatisfied Mennonites in his society were left with no other alternative than to begin a quest to secure baptism either by a minister of an existing religious group or by mutual baptism (Wittlinger 1978:22). Following the advice of a Dunker preacher, Engel and his fellow Mennonite seekers baptized each other. They swore each other to secrecy about who baptized whom so that the group would not be called by the name of any particular individual founder.

Engel and his group also drew some of their inspiration from itinerant preachers leading revivals in Lancaster County. In 1784, Martin Boehm, a Mennonite minister, conducted a widely noticed revival in Donegal, Lancaster County. His services followed those of previous Methodist revivalist preachers (Hostetler 1974–75:10). Boehm was an itinerant preacher for persons of Anabaptist background, especially the Mennonites. Since he preached in the German language, he reached many Germans in the backcountry and frontier areas of Lancaster County.[3] Engel and people like him attended Boehm's great barn meetings in Donegal, endorsed his preaching, and may have experienced under his ministry the pietistic "new birth," leading them to emphasize public testimony of their intensely personal religious convictions (Wittlinger 1978:21). Boehm's liberal views on baptism, however, alienated Engel and those who were gathering about him.

Meanwhile, Martin Boehm developed a loosely organized society known as the United Brethren; the group was characterized by a strong pietistic emphasis, with emotional, public testimony and small classes for prayer, testimony, and Bible study. Boehm was aided by Philip William Otterbein, an ordained German Reformed minister, and Christian Newcomer—like Boehm, a former Mennonite. The three cooperated across denominational lines with other German-speaking revivalists, including associates of Jacob Albright and English Methodist evangelists under Francis Asbury who itinerated among Pennsylvania Germans. They provided leadership for a spiritual awakening (Wittlinger 1978:10). Using the techniques of house-to-house meetings for fellowship in prayer and for cultivating the Christian life, in addition to the "great meetings" in barns and in the open, these leaders broke through denominational barriers and attracted numerous followers (ibid., 10, 21).

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Engel and his associates drew their pietistic influences from the United Brethren, Albright's Evangelical Association, and Asbury's Methodist movement

(Frantz 1991:171). Jacob Engel drew theological elements from each group but did not unite with any of them (Wittlinger 1978:21). The River Brethren also retained much of the Mennonite background out of which they emerged, and they joined a Pietist understanding of the new birth (as essential to salvation within the disciplined community) to the scriptural obedience characteristic of Anabaptism (ibid.). Engel's group borrowed many ordinances from the Dunkers: election of leaders rather than casting lots, wearing of beards, banning the unfaithful, baptism by trine immersion, anointing the sick, the communion love feast, footwashing, visitation by deacons, and the holy kiss.

River Brethren rejected the Dunker view that Christ instituted a sacred supper as a prelude to communion and differed from the Dunkers on the nature of conversion at baptism. For Dunkers, baptism was likened to the remission of sin based on repentance and faith. When Dunkers baptized, they believed that sins were obliterated in the baptism of immersion. To the River Brethren, baptism was an act of obedience and a public statement to the community that the individual had experienced earlier conversion and entered a new life in Christ (Wittlinger 1978:65).

The Establishment of the River Brethren

It is difficult to pinpoint the date for the formal establishment of the River Brethren.[4] Various scholars have placed River Brethren origins between 1770 and 1784.[5] The stated theology for the Old Order River Brethren derives from the *1770 Confession of Faith of the Brethren*. Today, Old Order River Brethren theology continues the 1770 confession in its emphasis on the church as a disciplined, gathered community. The original confession contained three sections. Christianity, the founders declared first, must be entered through a spiritual crisis, followed by new birth (Schrag 1964:347). Influenced by the United Brethren, the confession emphasized the pietistic view that it is not necessary to dispute about theology but to enter into a personal relationship with God. This portion of the confession outlined mankind's fall, atonement, and repentance (in an attempt to convince man of his wayward condition), as well as the receiving of God's grace. This had become the norm of Pietist expression. As part of conversion, one was to become a submitted disciple of Christ, a concept that revealed Mennonite and Dunker influence. Discipleship and outer obedience were central, and

in this regard, the Anabaptist movement and the Pietist traditions reinforced each other (ibid., 350).

The second part of this early confession dealt with the concept of the church. The church was a fellowship of believers practicing three ordinances: baptism, the Lord's Supper, and footwashing. The confession stressed the believer's baptism by trine immersion (another influence from the Dunkers, who placed a stronger emphasis on ordinances than the Mennonites). But unlike the Dunkers, who believed in baptismal regeneration, River Brethren perceived baptism as distinct from salvation and as a sign of obedience (ibid., 351). The confession declared the Lord's Supper a memorial to his sacrifice, and it advocated public and private meetings for edifying and building up the spiritual life, a pietistic hallmark of the United Brethren and Moravians.

The third section of the 1770 confession concerned the attitude of the River Brethren toward the world. The confession forbade swearing an oath, barred taking part in police actions, and endorsed nonresistance. These features reflected Mennonite and Dunker thought. Christians, according to the confession, were subject to the government "in all that is good" (ibid., 353). The confession united several of the prevailing religious traditions of eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, and it illustrated the blend of religious traditions that formed the River Brethren yet kept them distinct from other groups.

Following the War for American Independence (1775–83), the River Brethren attracted converts, consolidated, and expanded. Few records exist to document this period, but patriot resentments must have smoldered after the war. In 1788, two years after Mennonite families from Pennsylvania emigrated to Canada and after the River Brethren consolidation, a group of River Brethren families left the northern frontier district of Lancaster County (now Lebanon County) to emigrate to the Niagara Peninsula. The declaration of free land for those who had remained loyal to the British cause and had suffered for that loyalty contributed to a Bucks County Mennonite migration and perhaps to the Lancaster County River Brethren migration as well (Fretz 1989:26).

The River Brethren who relocated to the Niagara Peninsula were among the first in a continuing pattern of migration that also led families to cross the Susquehanna River to the "western" counties (such as Franklin County) and even beyond, heading toward states in the Midwest. Lancaster County families who migrated to Canada were part of the newly founded

River Brethren, designated "Tunkers" in upper Canada for their mode of baptism.[6] Except for the post-Revolution migration of River Brethren families to the Niagara Peninsula, the historical record for 1780–1800 is silent on the River Brethren.

Migration, Growth, Consolidation, and Schism, 1800–1900

Frontier folk, starved for want of religion and religious leadership, received guidance through the revivalist efforts of the Methodist circuit riders. Despite extreme hardships, these preachers took the doctrines of Methodism to the frontier Germans.[7] A profusion of sects and religious movements—combined with lack of ministerial leadership—characterized the state of religion in Pennsylvania at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The River Brethren refused to accept the Methodist Wesleyan holiness movement prevalent on the Pennsylvania frontier (a movement that emphasized attainment of inner perfection), although other Brethren groups were open to it.

The introduction of Pietism in the eighteenth century and Wesleyan holiness in the nineteenth led to a continuing emphasis on an individual, personal salvation experience, a crisis experience of conviction of sin, leading to remorse, penitence, and entrance into a new life. The River Brethren shifted from Anabaptism (and the Anabaptist ethic of the "suffering, persecuted Christian") as a means of keeping separation, moving instead toward the dramatic, individualistic, inward conversion experience of Pietism. The River Brethren closed ranks around the latter belief, focusing on the sufferings of Christ and the reconciliation of the individual directly with God. Much of the subsequent River Brethren division during the mid-nineteenth century related not to good works and experiential religion but to legalism, interpretation of doctrine, implementation of authority and discipline, and the tendency of regional differences in decision making to cause fragmentation among the leadership.

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, however, River Brethren faith must have appealed to other groups whose members were apparently converting to Engel's group, as one Lutheran writer noted in

1814: "Brethren Böhm and Draxel were actively at work and not without blessing. Engel, however, who is now founding a new group at the river, is fishing away many of their best congregational members. The mercy of the Lord seems also to be working toward life among the last named" ("Gestalt des Reichs" 1814:135). This critic assessed other Protestant groups collectively as "A wild weed, . . . and self-righteous, . . . a Christian name but a heathen's heart" (ibid., 1–2). The writer praised Engel, indicating that Engel's pietistic group was the only one to avoid the failings of other sectarian and revivalist groups.

Patterns of formation, consolidation, and division were characteristic of the River Brethren and other sectarian groups in nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. Jacob Engel was a capable leader who bridged the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and lived to see his group grow and expand under his direction. He could not have foreseen that his death in 1832 would precipitate a burning controversy that would split his group twenty years later.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, by Brethren accounts, the River Brethren movement became "substantial and troublesome" due to the inroads it had made in securing converts from other groups. A letter from Dunker ministers in Blair and Bedford Counties, for example, referred to differences between the Dunkers and River Brethren, differences based upon their respective understandings of baptism. For Dunkers, remission of sin was accomplished by the cleansing of baptism before the candidate could achieve sanctification. The annual Dunker meeting of 1815 (at White Oak near Manheim in Rapho Township, Lancaster County) directed most of its attention to the River Brethren issue. Concerned with the similarities between the River Brethren and the "Old Brethren, or Dunkers," the Dunker minister took pains to draw a precise line between the two by stating that members were "led astray" and confused by the River Brethren doctrines (Durnbaugh 1993:147).

Dunker elders alleged that the River Brethren described Dunkers as "a crowd of dead men, who have not yet come to new life," "unconverted who know nothing of conversion," a "dead heap of flesh because they baptized too soon [before repentance]," the "life of God in them . . . presently again extinguished, so they could not come to the [new birth]." Dunkers declared that these contentious River Brethren expressions "do not proceed from above, nor will they create love." The Dunker elders declared that they would allow the River Brethren to enjoy their beliefs in peace if they would do the same for the Dunkers (ibid., 148). Such acrimonious

exchanges between competing groups were typical of this period of extreme religious flux and diversity in Pennsylvania (Frantz 1991:179).

Migration patterns into Dauphin County from Lancaster County and (west of the Susquehanna) from York County to Franklin and Cumberland Counties occurred by individual families rather than by groups. By the 1840s, the River Brethren in Franklin County had become so numerous that they divided into two districts, Northern Franklin County and Southern Franklin County, with the Lincoln Highway (US Route 30) as the dividing line (Schrag 1995:69). Meanwhile, growth and migration continued into four other states and the Canadian province of Ontario.

With so many members moving to Franklin County, it was proper that the Franklin County branch should have more oversight. Converted to the River Brethren in 1803 at the age of twenty-eight, Christian Lesher was chosen bishop of the Franklin County group in 1829 (ibid., 84). In the 1840s, as the River Brethren group reached its seventy-five-year mark, rifts and fissures developed within the community. The River Brethren divided into three groups, and as is typical among sectarian societies, the dissenting groups were either more or less open to change than the parent body (Wittlinger 1978:133).

This midcentury schism began in the 1840s, when a division occurred in Bishop Lesher's Franklin County River Brethren over an incident concerning John Hess, one of the group's members. The group disagreed over the interpretation of Leviticus 18, which deals with sexual immorality. Sources are unclear about the actual circumstances, but the implication is that Hess had engaged in some sexual act contrary to Leviticus 18 or participated in a marriage union between himself and a "closer blood relative" (Schrag 1995:90). The passage related to the latter reads, "None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness" (Lev. 18:6, 20:10–21 KJV).

The River Brethren held no official council meeting to make the decision to excommunicate John Hess. Instead, Bishop Christian Lesher made the decision himself at the Micha Meyer love feast and defended it with Bishop Jacob Strickler's statement that "there was nothing wrong with Lesher putting Hess out of the church" (Schrag 1995:92). John Hess confessed his grief before the River Brethren, qualifying it by saying, "the deed that I have done is one that I have never been convinced was wrong or improper" (ibid., 93). Upon his confession, Hess was reinstated to fellowship and communion.

However, at a council meeting in Washington County, Maryland, just across the border from Franklin County, Pennsylvania, other bishops decided to chastise Bishop Lesher for his part in the Micha Meyer love feast council, because he "allowed this fault in the church and did not chasten them [the River Brethren] for disagreeing with the marriage interpretation in Leviticus 18." Thus, Bishop Lesher was excommunicated for "not walking in the doctrine of Christ" and for the mishandling of the John Hess incident (ibid., 95).

At another council, held November 17, 1853, bishops stated that those who believed that the Leviticus passage referred to marriage could hold to their view, and those who believed that the passage concerned fornication and adultery could hold to theirs (ibid., 97). This council compromised, stating that in the future, close blood relatives were forbidden to marry and that the River Brethren should admonish members against such marriages. All past controversy should be forgotten and housekeeping (discipline) was to be resumed as before. Bishop Lesher was restored to his position and full participation in the brotherhood.

The Hess controversy also created a serious breach among Dauphin County's Bishop Daniel Engel and Franklin County's Bishop Christian Lesher (both of whom advocated excommunication for Hess) and Franklin County's Bishop Hoover (who interpreted Leviticus 18 as "fornication and adultery"). They were divided over their differing interpretations of Leviticus 18 and the severity or leniency of the groups in dealing with John Hess's transgression. These events revealed a more serious, underlying problem among the River Brethren: personality differences and rivalry as to who would provide decisive leadership.

In 1854, the tension created by the Hess question became apparent when the Conoy-Donegal district bishop, John Gish, excommunicated Bishop Christian Hoover and his Franklin County followers for being "too orthodox" (Landis 1960:302). The orthodoxy that Gish referred to in the Hooverites was not theological but legalistic. It related to the commitment to historic faith and practice, especially in separation from the world (Schrag 1995:98). Conservatism on issues of discipline seems to have been the reason that the Hooverites parted ways with the more liberal Franklin County members and the liberal Conoy-Donegal group. In other words, the Conoy-Donegal district tended toward moderation in discipline, while the Franklin County group remained conservative on issues of biblical interpretation and discipline.

As in previous quarrels among the River Brethren, geographic location played a part in the schism. Lesher declared that members from Chambersburg, Franklin County, and Maryland voted with the opposition from "the other side of Chambersburg," creating an opposition majority (ibid., 94). These River Brethren, Bishop Lesher felt, refused to listen to God's Word in Leviticus 18, and Lesher asserted that he could not agree with them. The Franklin County River Brethren demoted Christian Lesher from his position of bishop, rejected the ruling made at Daniel Engel's council for excommunication, and restored John Hess to the brotherhood.

River Brethren Leadership and the Meetinghouse Controversy

River Brethren fragmentation was not due exclusively to differences in doctrine and practice, but also to a struggle for credibility, authority, and leadership. Members responded to the charisma of the founder, Jacob Engel, and some of his successors. But by 1832, Jacob Engel was dead, and his replacement, Jacob Strickler, died in 1842. In the years following the death of these founders, personality differences and power struggles among the next generation of leaders resulted in schism. In the collective memory of the River Brethren, much of the trouble surrounded the challenges of a firebrand minister named Matthias Brinser (1795–1889).

Brinser was described by Dunker writer Christian Henry Balsbaugh (1831–1909) as the "ruling spirit of their revolt. . . . The head, heart, and front of their organization" (Durnbaugh 1993:141–42). Having known Brinser from childhood, Balsbaugh compared him to "an old prophet—some fiery Tishbite brimful of scripture and terribly eloquent, especially where he stands on Mount Ebal" (ibid., 142).[8] Brinser's reputation as a preacher earned him the epithet of "silver-tongued orator of Dauphin County," and there is speculation that the Conoy River Brethren may have been jealous of his ability to draw crowds (Miller 1906:20).[9] A potent leader with ideas about renewing the River Brethren community, Brinser met resistance when he questioned the traditional River Brethren stand on meetinghouses.

River Brethren elders argued that meetinghouses went against their goal of setting religion as a total formula for living. They considered meetinghouses an institution that separated religion from everyday life, compartmentalized religion (according it a special time and place), and hampered the fellowship of the group (Hostetler 1992:15). Brinser, however, publicly

asserted that meetinghouses would help build community, and the issue caused division in the group.

On May 16, 1853, Brinser requested that a meetinghouse be built for him. On a stormy night one hundred years after the birth of River Brethren founder Jacob Engel, a conference of moderate Conoy River Brethren was held in John Engel's home near Stackstown in Conoy Township, Lancaster County; they met until 2:00 A.M. to debate Matthias Brinser's proposal (Miller 1906:20–21). The River Brethren gathered against the proposal, and Brinser left hastily, explaining that he wanted to reach home before the streams became too swollen to cross. According to River Brethren accounts, the heavy rains that fell that day were not conducive to the "peace and harmony of a religious conference where radical differences existed." Brinser left the conference "ignoring the counsel of the Brethren," and the deliberations were set forth in a letter in German asking Brinser to desist from building the meetinghouse (ibid., 21). Brinser would not be reined in, and he pressed on with the construction of the meetinghouse.

The conservative group, centered in York County, became alarmed by the progressive tendencies of Brinser and also by "some gradual changes that were creeping in."[10] Unhappy at the way in which moderate members in Donegal and Conoy Townships had handled the controversy, the conservatives proclaimed that Brinser had not been disciplined firmly enough (Scott 1978:14). For two years the River Brethren debated whether to discipline him.

In the summer of 1855, the River Brethren reached a "unanimous decision" to expel Brinser "as an heathen and a tax collector" (*U.Z.: A History* 1981:13). Brinser retorted bitterly, "*Sie fressen einmal was sie now kutzen* [They will soon devour what they now vomit]" (Brechbill 1972:37).[11] Expelled from the community over the meetinghouse, Brinser lived to see the River Brethren adopt meetinghouses of their own. Within a decade, the Conoy faction (which eventually became the denomination of the Brethren in Christ) fulfilled Brinser's prophetic warning, and Brethren in Christ meetinghouses became commonplace.

The River Brethren may have waited two years to excommunicate Brinser in an attempt to prevent a split between the River Brethren and the conservative York County members. If so, this ploy was unsuccessful (ibid., 35–36). Brinser's group quickly became a thriving body of believers settled in Elizabethtown, Lancaster County; Middletown, Dauphin County; and in several localities in Lebanon County. The 1855 division among the River

Image not available

Fig. 2 This broadside, entitled "The Separation of the River-Brethren," lists the names of the twenty-six brethren who opposed Bishop Matthias Brinser's decision to build a meetinghouse in 1853. In English, the letter reads: "Conoy Township, Lancaster County, May 16, 1853. Beloved Brethren: We wish you the peace of God and the love of Jesus Christ with heartfelt greetings, we the undersigned brethren have held a council, concerning the contemplation of building a meetinghouse in your neighborhood, and have unanimously concluded to ask you that you shall not build it, as such a building we believe would become an open door to a great evil, and would make heavy hearts for many brethren. Therefore, we request of you, out of heartfelt love, that you will accept our counsel." (See Brechbill 1972:37.) Courtesy of *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* (July 1978).

Brethren was pivotal in the development of those Old Order River Brethren who claimed to remain faithful to the teachings of Jacob Engel. Between the summer of 1855 (when Brinser's excommunication took place) and March 1856, the conservative members of York County withdrew to form the orthodox wing known as the "Yorkers," and the Conoy moderates retired to form the Brethren in Christ. In Franklin County, conservative followers of Bishop Hoover made common cause with the Yorkers. The letter of admonition to Dauphin County Bishop Brinser was signed by leaders of both the Lancaster County and Franklin County groups. These groups would not have cooperated in expelling Brinser had they previously divided into Brethren in Christ and Old Order River Brethren. Thus, Franklin County sided with the orthodox River Brethren in York County and became the Franklin County wing of the Yorkers, or Old Order River Brethren. From the beginning, the Yorkers were a small group, having no more than five or six hundred members (Hostetler 1974–75:13). The Yorkers objected to the Conoy group's tendency to embrace modern changes in the church, and the Yorkers and Hooverites subsequently separated from the parent group (Wittlinger 1978:137).[12]

Geography, Orthodoxy, and Plainness in the Late Nineteenth Century

York and Franklin County River Brethren called themselves the "western" group, and the Franklin County group referred to the Lancaster County group as the "distant Brethren" (Schrag 1967:100). These geographical separations led each group to institute different versions of orthodoxy. This situation led, perhaps inevitably, to the fracturing of unity among the River Brethren. Franklin County's Bishop Hoover, who believed that moderates were "unfaithful" to the Gospel, emphasized the injunction of St. Paul: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 7:17 KJV). In keeping with his adherence to the founding principles of the River Brethren, Hoover may have believed that his only option was to excommunicate the moderates. The Yorkers, who sided with the Hooverites, considered the Conoy members too progressive; they asserted that this Lancaster County group had begun to accept the Sunday School movement and take part in elections, lawsuits, and other worldly practices. When the Yorkers offered reconciliation shortly after the schism, the Lancaster County moderates declared them no longer River Brethren, in view

of the fact that the Yorkers had previously withdrawn from the church. The final breach from the parent group was completed. The original group founded by Jacob Engel three-quarters of a century earlier had now separated into three groups of varying degrees of orthodoxy: conservative Old Order River Brethren, the moderate Conoy Brethren in Christ group, and Matthias Brinser's progressive group, known as United Zion's Children.

Two River Brethren decision-making processes laid the foundation for discontent. First, Bishop Hoover of Franklin County considered the issues "by the Gospel" and granted the right of last word to the "elder bishops." These orthodox River Brethren of the western counties held to the decision of the bishops rather than a majority vote. The Conoy Brethren in Christ, in contrast, made decisions on the basis of polling its members. As a result, the groups viewed with suspicion the legitimacy of each other's councils.

The second divisive issue was the tendency of sectarian groups to evolve into churches in the second or third generation (Wilson 1970). The moderate Conoy Brethren in Christ and the progressive Brinserites (or United Zion's Children) felt the pull of dominant society in their acceptance of Sunday schools, meetinghouses, public elections, and missions outreach. Thus, in time, they shed their sectarian identities and aligned themselves as established Protestant churches.

Less consequential in the division were the differences in doctrine over Leviticus 18, which had precipitated the schism in the first place. Questions of biblical interpretation were less relevant than the problems created by the group's inability to determine leadership and decision-making responsibilities based upon the geographic division created by the Susquehanna River. Brinser's excommunication highlighted the larger, divisive matters of decision making, the assimilation process, and the degree of accommodation to modernity.

Hardly any documents exist from the second half of the nineteenth century to follow the history and growth of the Old Order River Brethren after their division. Diaries, however, remain; though not particularly introspective, they do chronicle daily events and give descriptions of church activities. Diary entries written by members of the Strickler and Keller families revealed that the Brethren had accepted and used many mechanical conveniences of the industrial period by the turn of the century (Strickler 1899–1910).

The negotiation of modern culture itself raised another crucial concern for the River Brethren: demarcating the limits of plainness. Works on plain

culture from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries indicate that River Brethren struggled with this question. Phebe Earle Gibbons's volume, *"Pennsylvania Dutch," and Other Essays* (1882), contains a reference to a River Brethren man who was expelled for voting in elections. Gibbons's statement, "but still some of the Brethren will vote," suggests conflicts over voting, implying that some Brethren went to the polls regardless of community censure and that the practice was *not* necessarily grounds for automatic expulsion. However, this brother was also charged with having a melodeon (a musical instrument) and with insuring his property, a sure sign to the River Brethren that he did not trust sufficiently in the Lord's protection. This was not an anomalous case: the definition of what was plain and what was worldly was debated repeatedly during this period.

By the 1890s, the Old Order River Brethren had embraced technology. They began using the latest farm equipment, such as milk separators and seed drills. Old Order River Brethren installed bathrooms in their houses and ordered goods from the Sears catalog. They regularly used public transportation, traveling by trolley ("the cars") or by train to see distant relatives or to attend love feast celebrations in Franklin County.[13] The Old Order River Brethren used the services of dentists and physicians from the cities of York and Lancaster, and they had long supported public education in English. It is evident that by this time, the River Brethren had moved toward accommodating American society and technology. Yet they continued to hold fast to tenets of their faith as a separated remnant.

Ahead loomed the early decades of the twentieth century, which would pose the abiding question of how to maintain separation in an industrializing environment perceived to be rapidly changing. Devices representing that modernity—such as electricity, telephones, and automobiles—took center stage in disagreements among the Old Order River Brethren.

Technology, Acculturation, and Accommodation, 1900–1996

As industrialization advanced at the end of the nineteenth century, groups such as the Old Order River Brethren argued over issues of modernization. Different plain groups made distinct choices. Church of the Brethren and

Mennonite groups decided to modernize around the turn of the century; the more conservative Amish retained their traditions of visible separation and noninvolvement with the host society. The Old Order River Brethren had to make similar decisions. The River Brethren chose a middle route, negotiating their way between selective use of technology and separation from the world.

Taking notice of the doctrinal arguments of Old Order River Brethren in *The Small Sects in America* (1937), sociologist Elmer Clark noted that the River Brethren "are legalistic in strictly adhering to what they regard as scriptural patterns; they practice trine forward immersion, anoint the sick with oil, observe the communion meal with the Eucharist, dress in the plainest manner in opposition to all modern fashions, cover the heads of their women with a veil or light cloth, have few or no salaried ministers, are pacifist in their attitude to war, oppose secret societies and labor unions, generally refrain from participation in politics, and do not indulge in amusements, strong drink, tobacco, slang or other 'worldly' practices. Musical instruments are forbidden in churches, and photographs, fairs and exhibitions, life insurance and lightning rods are also forbidden" (Clark 1937:260–61). Although the group appeared to Clark to be similar to the Dunkers, he noted distinctive schisms over "alleged departures from the original principles concerning nonconformity" (ibid., 260).

Clark estimated that the three main bodies of the River Brethren constituted 5,670 members, confined mainly to Pennsylvania and Ohio. The Brethren in Christ, with eighty churches, was the largest body: it had 4,300 members. The Old Order River Brethren (Yorkers) were a much smaller sect, with only ten churches serving 470 members. United Zion's Children, by comparison, had twenty-eight churches and 900 members.

Geographical separation contributed to the fragmentation among the River Brethren. Group attachment to particular regions, such as Franklin County or Lancaster County, consistently played a part in divisions. The Susquehanna River was a psychological as well as geographic boundary between the groups. Theology aside, such regional demarcations influenced group boundaries well into the twentieth century.

Geography and region also played a part in disagreements over technological innovations at the turn of the century. Groups residing in different localities made independent decisions regarding the adoption of electricity, telephones, and automobiles. As early as 1912, the Dallas Center group in Iowa installed telephones. By the time the York County group made the decision to excommunicate telephone users, the entire Iowa group already

owned telephones, so the issue of excommunication was dropped. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that electricity and telephones became available to most Lancaster County members. By then, the River Brethren accepted these conveniences with some debate, but without the discord that had led to schism over previous issues (Lloyd Dietrich 1995b).

Despite the seriousness of debates over whether to adopt electricity and telephones, the greatest controversy centered on the automobile (Lloyd Dietrich 1995d). In 1919, the ministry decided that anyone who purchased a car would be automatically expelled. One member in Iowa tested this ruling by purchasing a car, but Bishop Jacob Keller of Iowa took no action (Scott 1978:18). Concerned about these developments, Bishop Simon H. Musser of Lancaster County called a meeting of the other bishops in 1921. In a letter, the bishops declared Bishop Keller out of fellowship for not enforcing the ministry guidelines concerning automobiles. The remaining Pennsylvania bishops signed the letter, and the missive was sent to Bishop Henry Etter of Iowa, who promptly decreed that the Pennsylvania bishops acted against the practice of the church. He responded that the Pennsylvania bishops would be disciplined unless they changed their position. The Franklin County bishops then called a meeting between Bishop Keller and all the other bishops.

Bishop Musser of Lancaster County would not consent to the meeting. A majority of the Lancaster County group sided with Musser, and a few other supporters came from York County and Franklin County. Minister William Kniesley of Dallas Center, Iowa, backed Musser. In 1921, Bishop Musser and Bishop Kniesley and his followers in Iowa severed fellowship with the "Old Church." This event reflected the continuing confusion and disagreement over which bishops, those from Pennsylvania or Iowa, could excommunicate whom, and these disagreements again fell along geographic lines of power. In 1930, Bishop Keller was expelled for allowing his Iowa group to own cars. The majority of Iowa members and about half the Ohio church sided with Keller.

In 1948, a conflict arose between Simon H. Musser and minister John Strickler, and Strickler formed his own group (ibid., 19). By 1951, the Lancaster County Musser Group consented to the use of autos, but specified that members must purchase black station wagons and that the chrome must be painted black (Hostetler 1974–75:13; Scott 1978:19). Shortly thereafter, the Keller Group also permitted members to own cars, but did not insist that the chrome be blackened. The Strickler Group adopted cars in 1954.

In the late 1950s, Bishop Jacob Horst of Lancaster County, a member of the "Old Church," declined to excommunicate members who owned cars. He observed that the deepening crisis over the use of the automobile was jeopardizing the survival of the group. The Old Order River Brethren community was so fragmented that ever-increasing numbers of young people were converting to more moderate, non–River Brethren groups, particularly the Church of the Brethren (Dunkers). Bishop Horst had a prophetic dream that led him to believe that the future survival of the church was at risk over the automobile issue. "In 1960 Bishop Horst dreamed that he was in a large room. A guard would not let him out of this room until he promised to give a message to the church: 'The brethren need to open the doors for the young people.' He awoke from his dream and began to read the Bible. The pages fell open to Psalms, where he read, 'Thou hast set my feet in a large room'" (Scott 1978:19).

Bishop Horst, convinced by this dream from God, preached to the other leaders in the church the message that auto ownership should be permitted; otherwise, he argued, the issue would tear the church apart and cause members to withdraw in favor of other groups. "Converts" who had been waiting to see the outcome of the automobile issue then consented to join the Horst Group. The "Old Church" (or "Horse and Buggy Group") in Franklin County remained unconvinced, and by 1963 this group had lost half of its members to the Horst Group over the automobile issue (ibid.).[14] One man—the son of a deceased member—had experienced these changes as a boy, and he recalls, "They gave up the horse and buggy for the *good* stuff when they bought cars, Pontiacs and Oldsmobiles" (Demey 1995).

While the automobile created division in the "Old Church," then, all groups (except for the "Horse and Buggy" community in Franklin County) eventually accepted the automobile. This turn of events suggests that acceptance of the automobile was not the most crucial question for the Old Order River Brethren; rather, geographic separation, personality clashes, and discord over the decision-making process were the real issues in the schism. Members of the Lancaster County group recognized that if these disagreements were perpetuated, the young people would leave, and the group would cease to exist. Their alarm over the survival of the Old Order River Brethren opened the door to dialogue among the three groups. In March 1969, the Keller and Strickler Groups merged. And on December 11, 1977, the Stricklers and Kellers officially combined with the Musser Group. One week later, they held a united love feast (Scott 1978:20).

On Saturday, July 11, 1993—140 years after the 1853 schism that first rent the River Brethren, and 16 years after the Strickler-Keller-Musser merger in 1977—more than three hundred people gathered for a historic reunion. Called "A Gathering of River Brethren Descendants," it brought together the families of members of the three original branches of the River Brethren: Brethren in Christ, United Zion Church, and Old Order River Brethren. They met in morning worship at the United Zion Church in Elizabethtown, Lancaster County, to reaffirm their common origins and faith. This service featured hymns and prayers in German. Speakers from each group articulated their vision for the group's future. Reflecting their differences in accommodating to modernity, the Brethren in Christ (Conoy River Brethren), now the most progressive wing, sent a female minister to deliver the first message. She emphasized the presence of women in the ministry and missions field, a presence that Old Order River Brethren do not approve. Second on the program, a male preacher and a female song leader represented the United Zion Church (Brinserites), now the moderate group. This male-female combination symbolized the group's stance: men preach, but women have their place in evangelism, missions, and teaching positions in the church. Not surprisingly, the topic of women's ministry dominated the response of the Old Order River Brethren to the Brethren in Christ and United Zion Church messages at this reunion. As the rhetoric of the morning service demonstrated, women's roles vary in all three groups and are crucial to how the groups perceive their differences today.

Stephen Scott spoke about the history of the Old Order River Brethren and its Biblicist theology. His plain clothing and authoritative manner reinforced the traditional roles he outlined in his presentation. He discussed the division of women and men, their faithfulness to the literal interpretation of Scripture, and their desire to remain separate in accordance with their historical experience and their sectarian religious beliefs. While representatives of the United Zion Church and Brethren in Christ hinted in their presentations about the possibility of reunification, Scott implied in his address that Old Order River Brethren did not consider reunification with either of the two progressive wings possible. As one Brethren in Christ member related, "Brothers and sisters with whom [they] were once one . . . now walk the path of obedience in different ways" (Spurrier 1993:17).

Commenting on the event in September 1999, Stephen Scott indicated that he may have sounded firmer at the reunion than he intended. In a letter

to folklorist Simon Bronner, he wrote, "Would we need to abandon our beliefs and traditions to reunite with the United Zion Church [UZ] and the Brethren in Christ [BIC]? I don't think they would have much problem accepting us the way we are. On the other hand could the BIC and UZ revert to traditional practices in order to merge with the OORB? But really, what would be the point in such a merger? We do have a common heritage, but we have diverged to the point that we have very little in common now. . . . Most Old Order River Brethren would feel that the two sister churches have departed from the original practices of the church, but most would not have a condemnatory attitude toward them" (Scott 1999).

The evening activities at the reunion underscored Scott's point. More than 450 people gathered for supper on the lawn around a farmhouse (Spurrier 1993:17). It was easy to identify the Old Order River Brethren. Their appearance and dress distinctively marked them. The Old Order River Brethren conducted the evening service in the traditional barn meeting, kneeling for prayers and "lining-out" the old hymns. In lining-out, the leader reads a line or two of the hymn and the gathered faithful sing the words in response. Once "practically universal among Pennsylvania's Church Dutch," according to Don Yoder, the custom "dragged out" congregational singing, and was abandoned by many churches in the twentieth century (Yoder 1961:121–28). Its persistence in Old Order River Brethren services affirmed a tie to original River Brethren tradition and gave a stark, "old-fashioned" feel to this part of the proceedings.

The barn service stood in contrast to the morning service in the simple but modern United Zion Church building. The ancient order of the barn service underscored group differences rather than the common origins of the Old Order River Brethren and their sister denominations. While they demonstrated their goodwill by participating in the historic reunion, the Old Order River Brethren left no illusions that they would abandon their beliefs and traditions to reunite with the United Zion Church and the Brethren in Christ.

With the unification of the Strickler-Keller-Musser Group and the rejection of possible reunification with the progressive sister wings, the Old Order River Brethren have drawn firm boundaries around themselves. The risk to them in retaining their separateness (and small numbers) is that they cannot maintain enough followers to support their community. The River Brethren want to remain a separated remnant, upholding the spirit of Jacob Engel's original River Brethren. In the symbolism of plain dress,

the traditional fellowship meal, and the evening barn meeting at the reunion, the nature of Old Order River Brethren—as an ethnic religious group separate from the two modern branches—stood out quite distinctly.

Contemporary River Brethren Society and Tradition

The Old Order River Brethren are among the smallest of Old Order groups, with fewer members than the Old German Baptist Brethren, the Old Order Mennonites, and the Old Order Amish (Hostetler 1992:8). The combined membership of the three remaining Old Order River Brethren groups—the Old Church, the Horst Group, and the Strickler-Keller-Musser Group—stands at about 325.[15] Nonmembers, including nonbaptized and dependent children, number about 207. My focus is on the 188 members in Lancaster County of the Strickler-Keller-Musser Group (or United Group, as they call themselves).

The custom of meeting in homes requires that the numbers in the group be modest. This built-in limit to the size of the group means that all members know one another (ibid., 16). This may be a conscious attempt to maintain the face-to-face contact so essential for community cohesion. A group too large, lacking such cohesion, would lose its ability to determine its identity as a separated, gathered community without the personal interaction possible in small numbers.

However, my interviews with Brother Lloyd Dietrich, an instructor at the Lancaster Mennonite high school, and Brother James Dietrich, a teacher at the Sonlight River Brethren School, revealed some members' concern that the size of River Brethren families has decreased too much. Brother James noted that the River Brethren birthrate began dropping in the mid-twentieth century. It was not unusual before then for families to have had 6, 8, or 10 children. In 1992, thirteen out of thirty-eight families had 5 or more children. The average number of children for Lancaster County families was 3.9 (Scott 1992). Brother James told me that there now seems to be a trend toward larger families, though this is difficult to determine because not many families are presently at childbearing age. At forty-two, James himself is personally in favor of larger families; he currently has 6 children.

About 12 percent of the River Brethren membership are "transfers" from other Christian churches (Lloyd Dietrich 1995c). Most of these members do not come from other plain groups, although some have prior experience with them. Transfer members often choose River Brethren over other "conservative" plain groups because the River Brethren speak English and use technological conveniences. Yet a number of transfer members also choose the River Brethren because among the plain groups, they are, according to Stephen Scott, "the most conservative group at the same technological level" (Scott 1999). The Lancaster County group has more transfers than the Franklin County group, because Franklin County is more isolated and rural. Brother Lloyd Dietrich notes, however, that increasing numbers of new transfers are entering the Franklin County group. In the Lancaster area, people "shop" the churches. Some stay, others move on. Brother Lloyd says that "Of those that join, we keep half."

Asked why these people seek River Brethren membership, Lloyd made a striking observation: "They make a 'pilgrimage' out of a Protestant church because they usually do not feel fulfilled in the Protestant circle. They sense the need for outward symbols to express their Christianity" (Lloyd Dietrich 1995b). He believes that people "fall in love with our culture."[16] James implies that these "pilgrims" seek social inclusion rather than spirituality. He explains, "They are attracted by the outward symbols of nonconformity [plain dress] and the friendliness of the members, rather than the Christ-centeredness of the group" (Dietrich 1992d). Even though social inclusion and spiritual seeking are not mutually exclusive, the River Brethren insist that the individual's relationship to Christ be the main criterion for membership.

Occasionally, transfers use River Brethren generosity for selfish ends. One transfer member exploited River Brethren donations of labor and materials to acquire a home and business. Others who transferred into the group believed that River Brethren were not "plain enough" and eventually withdrew. Those who are quick to "go plain" and display their outward symbols of belonging when they first join usually fall away, and the group has become wary of such newcomers. Brother James emphasizes that the River Brethren would rather get members with "conviction" (ibid.).

Both Lancaster County and Franklin County groups have had Catholic transfer members. James Dietrich opines that Catholics admitted to holy orders are similar to the River Brethren, because they both espouse separation from the world. A principal doctrinal difference between River Brethren

and Catholic orders, he says, is that Anabaptists practice their separation *within* the world, while Catholic monastic orders withdraw *from* the world.

Outsiders also present a problem for the River Brethren because of cultural differences. Brother James feels that there are problems with newcomers being ethnic outsiders to the group; many new members are not Pennsylvania German. James believes that Pennsylvania Germans are willing to work hard. "English" backgrounds, he reflects, make it difficult to blend in since the work ethic is stronger in the River Brethren.[17] James quotes Scripture to describe the work attitudes of some nonethnic transfers: "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed" (Luke 16:3 KJV). He laughs and says that some day he would like to write a book entitled, *So You Want To Be River Brethren,* with the subtitle, *What We Tell Our Children in Private* (about the problems of nonethnic transfers). James explains that the percentage of baptized persons who leave is very low. Of outside converts who leave the church, Brother James declares, "If they leave, then they never came" (Dietrich 1992a). James expresses the idea that if the transfer member leaves after being baptized into the Brethren, then he was never "right with God" before he joined the group.

The group's attitude toward children has been an issue for members and new converts alike. During the 1940s and 1950s, it was common for children in the Musser and Strickler Groups to dress plain before the age of ten. Later, many parents felt that it would be better for children to wait until their teens to dress plain. During the 1980s, the practice of dressing children around nine or ten years old in plain garb spread among the River Brethren, and converts did not fully understand this commitment. A minority of alarmed adults encouraged the young to wait until their mid-teens to adopt plain dress.[18]

When I interviewed him, Brother James taught upper-grade students at the Sonlight River Brethren School, which has an enrollment of about fifty-five students. The River Brethren want their children to do well. James stated that they do not want their children to take a "back seat" to other children in the world. Unlike the public school curriculum, however, sex education is not offered at the Sonlight School (this is to be taught at home); in addition, dancing is not part of physical education class. The main reason given for having the parochial school is that the children can be educated from a Christian perspective rather than a secular one.

River Brethren educators calculate school days to meet state regulations, although as a sectarian, private school, students do not have to attend class

for the state-mandated 180 days. Theoretically, higher education is available for all, but women generally do not attend college. A few women teach first through fifth grades in the Sonlight River Brethren School, because they "have patience," and because it is "traditional" for women to educate young children. The group feels that men should teach the upper grades (seventh though twelfth). The average educational level in all River Brethren groups is twelfth grade. River Brethren in Lancaster County—more than those in Franklin County—need a higher level of education to obtain jobs outside farming, however (ibid.).

The Ordnung

The Old Order River Brethren now engage in a variety of occupations besides the traditional farming of earlier generations. Their work reflects the economy of the areas in which they live. Men work in food-related industries, small home businesses, woodworking, house construction, and machine shops. Women primarily have roles as "housewives," but they also can be found in day care, nursing, secretarial, and food-related jobs outside the home. With the spread of computers during the 1990s, new areas of home-based work opened for River Brethren women.

The River Brethren place career restrictions on both men and women. Women can, for example, attend nursing, technical, business, or computer schools, or they can become teachers of primary-age children, but the group emphasizes that in these pursuits, women remain in the traditional gender roles of wife and mother. In families with young children, the River Brethren stress that women should stay at home, for they insist that family responsibilities outweigh work away from home. The River Brethren also avoid occupations related to the military, law enforcement, or politics (*Old Order River Brethren* n.d.). Men will not take jobs as policemen, public officials, bartenders, hairstylists, entertainers, or work in any other occupation that might conflict with their convictions on nonresistance or encourage actions "harmful to the body and spirit." Jobs that keep men away from their families for long periods, such as long-distance truck driving, are also discouraged.

The River Brethren have no written rules of conduct, however. The *Ordnung* is the flexible, unwritten code of behavior expected of all baptized Old Order River Brethren. These expectations are orally transmitted. Each

member is socialized from childhood to understand the boundaries and unwritten guidelines of these values, which became internalized. The group often tailors these rules of *Ordnung* to the social context. Indeed, the *Ordnung* has enabled the River Brethren to adapt to changes brought about by modernity (Hostetler 1992:24).

Although the River Brethren are known for their acceptance of modern technology, they forbid the use of television and any public entertainment involving modern technology, such as video games. Some members have radios in their barns, but only a few have them in their homes. Brother James related the reasoning of the group: "Television brings in all the culture that you don't want.[19] Radio you can control better" (Dietrich 1992d). The unwritten rules of the *Ordnung* allow a flexible range of behavior, giving people options in these "minor decisions."

This adaptability in the *Ordnung* gives the members a perception of control over their lives that might not be apparent to the outsider. Allowing members to make minor decisions balances the authority of the group with the individual's freedom to make personal choices. In this way, River Brethren maintain an equilibrium between the community and the individual. The River Brethren tolerate people who are marginal in some areas of belief, but who have "their heart with the Brethren." Brother James declared that everybody does not have to do the "same thing." The group believes that "being drawn together by love" matters the most (ibid.). And the River Brethren view their discipline in terms of loving admonition. Brother James described this process: "There is exhortation of the errant member if he does not do 'right.' Some take it personally, but usually it brings out what's wrong between members. There is a need for public confession to become joined to the Brethren" (ibid.).

Entering the Community

Joining the River Brethren is a demanding process. A council composed of church members and elders examines applicants. Brother James observed that the council gives a sense of the brotherhood, since its egalitarian nature allows all female and male members to have an equal vote. After the council's interview with the prospective member, the council asks the applicant to leave while the parents are questioned. After the parents leave, the council talks with the candidate's brothers and sisters. The final step is a

closed discussion to decide whether to accept the candidate. This is the last hurdle for joining the membership. James declared that this process can be agonizing for the group and for the applicant. By following this procedure, the River Brethren decide how much deviation from conforming behavior they will tolerate.

The River Brethren use the phrase "making a beginning" as shorthand for starting a Christian life, and a person who makes a beginning is called a convert. Dressing in plain clothing is only part of the process. Other changes have traditionally included making restitution for past wrongs, speaking in experience meeting, and offering audible prayer at the table and in family worship. A person is a convert for an unspecified time that ranges from a few months to several years. When a convert feels ready for church membership, he or she requests baptism at an experience meeting (a sharing of personal testimonies by members). After baptism, the individual is a member of the church, and participates in the love feast and the church council meeting. Most of the baptisms in Lancaster County have taken place in a pond on a senior deacon's farm near Mountville, Lancaster County. Some groups, like the Dunkers, have broken ice to baptize, but the River Brethren usually baptize in temperate weather from May through September, although a few baptisms have occurred as late as November.

The River Brethren have found marriage partners within the community among the three small groups in York/Lancaster, Franklin County, and Iowa. There have been numerous marriages among the various groups. In the United Group, for example, most of the marriages in the last thirty years have occurred between the various communities (that is, Lancaster County members have usually obtained marriage partners from Franklin County or Iowa). As members of the aging Horse and Buggy Group began to die off, their children joined the less orthodox Franklin County group. It is forbidden to marry first cousins, but the River Brethren allow marriage between second and more distant cousins. Brother James stated that he met his wife, a distant cousin, at a love feast in Ohio. The rate of transfer into the group has been higher in recent years, so the number of partners may increase.

Most River Brethren marry for life. A member who instigates a divorce will be excommunicated, but if a person is divorced by a nonmember spouse, he or she can remain a member if he or she remains unmarried. Members can remarry only if a spouse dies. Adultery is not grounds for

divorce, but it is cause for excommunication. James remarks that every New Testament passage that discusses remarriage mentions the word adultery. To clarify this forceful stand, he cites a poignant example: "One couple who is divorced keeps coming to service but will *never* be admitted to the congregation." He states, "We take a conservative stance, so that when Judgment Day comes, we are not responsible for other people's adultery" (ibid.).

Love Feast

River Brethren celebrate three love feasts during the year: fall and spring love feasts in Lancaster County, and in Franklin County, a May love feast. When the groups reunited, they compromised on this issue: since the Lancaster County group held four love feasts a year and the Keller Group had only one, they decided on three love feasts for the United Group. Members who own barns large enough to accommodate the group take turns hosting the love feast. The love feast takes place in the spring at the Sonlight River Brethren School because of harvest demands in fall and frequent problems of transportation in winter.

James explained that holding the meeting at the Sonlight River Brethren School was controversial, since it was traditional to use a barn or house. But because the River Brethren have decided not to build meetinghouses, it is likely that they will continue to meet in barns.[20] Hosting the love feast is voluntary and involves extensive preparations, including arrangements for overnight guests, preparation of the barn, and setting up for the communal meal afterward.

The love feast is associated with Brethren (Dunkers) custom. Among the Dunkers, it always consists of footwashing, the Lord's Supper, and communion, but the River Brethren omit the meat-based soup of the supper. Carl Bowman has noted that the love feast "simultaneously expressed the love the Brethren felt for their Maker and for each other. It was both a ritual of spiritual cleansing and a celebration of unity with Christ and the faith community" (Bowman 1995:59). The love feast consists of a series of services, lasting two days, that includes preaching, hymn singing, and the consumption of special foods. The River Brethren's contribution to the custom is the breadmaking ritual, which I will discuss in detail later.

Ethnographic descriptions of the River Brethren love feast are rare. One account of the River Brethren love feast comes from Laban Brechbill, who

describes an event on June 2–3, 1909, at the home of Brother Samuel Strickler. It gives a glimpse of the extensive preparations involved (divided by gender) and of the community-building function of the feast.

> The response was about forty-five brethren and sisters came to help. The brethren began their work to clean the barn, to remove cobwebs and dirt from the frame and rafters of the roof, to sweep and clean the barn floors so that there was a clean seating space. They erected the communion tables for both the brethren on the one barn floor and for the sisters on the adjoining barn floor. The seating capacity with the benches were arranged on both floors and on each mow that joined each floor. They made arrangements on the floor that the brethren occupied, for their broad brimmed hats, by suspending boards overhead at the edge of their floor. There was [*sic*] arrangements made for overnight guests by filling about thirty chaff bags with straw and placing them in the second floor rooms and on the attic of the house. The brethren prepared a dining area in a building separated from and between house and barn with a seating capacity of about one hundred. There also was a beef dressed that weighed around seven hundred pounds to be served on the tables. This meat was cooked in a large iron kettle, and when completed, and it became cool it was put in a place prepared that was cool such as an arched cellar by placing the receptacles in a proper position. On the love-feast days of Wednesday noon and Thursday morning breakfast[,] there was beef steak and rice soup served. On this same Monday, preparation day, the sisters prepared the house for many guests and prepared the decided on victuals for the love-feast days. In the afternoon part of the time was consumed in making and baking the unleavened bread, whose recipt [*sic*] for about one hundred members is, nine quarts of flour, two and one half pounds of unsalted butter, two quarts of milk direct from the cow. The ingredients of this recipt is mixed in a receptacle and then put on a table surrounded by sisters that knead the contents as follows; the deacons [*sic*] wife and the bishops [*sic*] wife work in unison in giving each sister a small amount until the whole is distributed among them, then each kneads her allotment for about one minute and then exchanges with another, and kneads that for about the same time. While the sisters are doing this kneading all

> the brethren present watch the ordeal and at the same time the Bishop explains concerning the ingredients in relation to the spiritual work of the individual. By this time kneading has discontinued and all the small lumps are put into one lump. They then take some and put it on a baking tin and roll it to a certain thickness and size, mark it in strips a little over an inch wide, and put it in the oven to bake; after baked it is ready for the communion table. (Brechbill 1972:106–7)

The next day, members and guests returned for morning worship, hymn, and prayer followed by a communal breakfast. According to Brechbill, "most of the preaching was done by visiting ministers" (ibid., 107), more services were scheduled after breakfast until eleven o'clock, and then the noon meal concluded the love feast. At this particular event, men had the responsibility for the horses and wagons, and women prepared and served the meals.

A more recent account of the River Brethren love feast comes from Beulah S. Hostetler, who documented the details of a service held in a barn on August 18, 1973, at Earnest Sauder's farm in Lancaster County (Hostetler 1974–75). Hostetler noted the unique emphasis that the River Brethren love feast placed on the experience meeting.

> Both men and women, and members of all ages, participate in the Experience Meeting. A distinctive pattern of procedure is followed. An individual, while seated, reads the first line of a hymn and gives the number of the hymn. One verse is sung by the group, then the individual arises and gives his or her testimony. The testimonies given by members during this period are quite different in emphasis and content from those the writer has heard presented in modern fundamentalist-type groups. Modesty and humility are much in evidence in these testimonies. There is stress on the unworthiness of self and the need to give one's self to Jesus. There may be recognition of temptation and there is frequent mention of the devil or the evil one. How a spiritual truth has been revealed to the individual may be shared. But in several hours of testimonies on several different occasions the writer only once heard a person recount benefits they had received other than spiritual peace. In this instance a person completely prepared for surgery appears to have been healed

> just before being taken to the operating room. Her accounting of the incident was so modest it was necessary to ask her about it afterwards in order to understand what she was relating. What frequently appears as near-boastfulness in testimony meetings was completely absent. Graphic personal details were seemingly avoided. The testimonies were often accompanied by tears. The Experience Meeting was followed by a sermon, and by a testimony to the sermon given by another minister. The group then knelt again for two prayers, and after the prayers were finished, sang a hymn. Following this the congregation was dismissed for the noon meal, which all present were invited to share. (Hostetler 1974–75:10)

Following with observations of the Lord's Supper, signifying the symbolism of the death of Christ, Hostetler dwelt at length on the footwashing, symbolizing the willingness of members to serve one another.

> The Scripture (St. John 13:1–17) which describes the occasion on which Jesus washed the disciples' feet was read, and this was followed by the sermon. Feet-washing began almost as soon as the sermon. At the women's tables the two inside rows of women reversed their chairs so as to sit facing each other in two long rows. The bishop's wife and the deacon's wife had made preparations, assisted by men in bringing in low pans of water. The women quietly and quickly removed their shoes and stockings. Two sisters girded themselves with towels as Jesus is described as having done (John 13). Large towels had been prepared for this purpose by sewing on apron bands, and the banded towels were tied on just as an apron would be. The first woman in the row, who had girded herself with a towel, knelt and washed the feet of first one, and then a second sister. The second woman dried their feet. They then passed their aprons on to two other women and seated themselves at the foot of the row. The ceremony continued until each person had had the opportunity to have his own feet washed and to wash the feet of another member. (Hostetler 1974–75:17)

In this dramatic gesture of footwashing, an egalitarian spirit related to "submission to God" and community is emphasized. As Hostetler observed, "One not only washes the feet of a fellow member; he also has his own feet washed.

He is willing to be served as well as to serve. All participate in the ceremony, no one is omitted. All are on an equal basis" (Hostetler 1974–75:19).

In the love feast, Hostetler also recognized the importance of "the Kiss of Unity" symbolizing "oneness, love, and brotherhood." It was done during the communion service after the footwashing ceremony. After a sermon, members stood, and the kiss was passed from one member to another around each table. They remained standing and sang the familiar song, "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," emphasizing the theme of community. She took note that the young women among the River Brethren held hands during the singing, but the other tables did not join hands. Still standing, the members offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the communion bread. As with the footwashing, there was a reciprocal exchange with the communion:

> Wafers of unleavened bread, about 9" by 2", which had been baked by members of the group the night before, were then distributed by ministers and deacons to perhaps every eighth person around the tables. Each person who received the bread quietly and solemnly broke off a piece, turned to the person next to him, and giving him the portion, said: "Beloved brother (sister), this bread which we break is the communion of the body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The wafer was then passed to the person who had just received his individual portion, and he spoke the same words as he served the person next in line. This was continued around the circle until each had received his portion. They were then all seated, and together ate the bread.

The ceremony of exchange in communion was repeated for the serving of wine from a common cup. While the cups were passed, songs such as "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" and "Go to Dark Gethsemane" were sung. Hymns such as "He that Drinks Shall Live Forever" were lined out at a customary slow, steady tempo. Following the serving of the cup, members knelt for prayers, concluding with the Lord's Prayer, which signaled the close of the service. Hostetler observed that at this point, "A joyous atmosphere followed the conclusion of the service. A spell seemed to have been broken, and warmth radiated everywhere" (ibid.). The "close communion" of the love feast is essential to maintaining the commitment of the group—not only to one another as members, but also to the fundamental principles of their faith in "equality and brotherhood" (ibid.).

The River Brethren extend the communal connections in love feast by encouraging mutual aid in everyday life. In addition to exchanging and donating services to members, the River Brethren recently helped some members with family budgeting. Tithing for the church occasionally occurs, but the emphasis is on members helping each other. The River Brethren take free-will offerings for the Sonlight School, though members whose children attend the school also address its financial needs. Some nonmember families who pay tuition receive financial aid from the church.

Some animosity from the previous division in the Old Order River Brethren still lingers. The Horse and Buggy Group members believe that the others left *them,* so they remain aloof from the other two River Brethren groups. Dissatisfied members have switched between the United and Horst Groups. However, despite this church hopping, interaction between the groups is not uncommon. Members attend each other's meetings, and there is much social visiting between the two groups. (Toward the end of the 1990s, in fact, the groups agreed to some exchange of ministry.) Some members would like to see changes; group leaders themselves hope that at some future point the three remaining groups will reunite.[21]

Theology and Polity

The River Brethren combine the pietistic emphasis on conversion and religious experience with the Mennonite and Brethren understanding of the church and its relationship to the world (Schrag 1964:353). Old Order River Brethren have a strong sense of mysticism and a desire to withdraw from the world, although they accept more of the world than, for example, the Old Order Amish (Klees 1950:71). One notable difference between Mennonites and Amish—the two largest Anabaptist groups—and the River Brethren is that the Brethren join Pietist elements to Anabaptist principles and thus create a more highly emotional pitch in worship (Dietz 1989a:116).[22]

Pietism, with its emphasis on the suffering of Christ, has deeply influenced the River Brethren in their religious forms and expression. Although not all pietistic groups employ the uncommonly slow singing style of the River Brethren, the River Brethren choose this mode in order

to deepen the message of the lyric; moreover, their solo testimony is deeply personal. The boisterous, self-involved individualism evident in evangelical testimony is absent. Old Order River Brethren testimony is restrained, though emotional, with quiet weeping. God is often invoked as all-powerful, while Christ Jesus is Savior, friend, intermediary, and intimate. In River Brethren worship, there is a detailed focus on the submissiveness of Jesus—the bitter agony of Christ on the cross, the sacrifice of the suffering, humble Savior. This image of Christ focuses particularly on the wounds and terrible tribulation of the crucifixion.

The unique practice of the River Brethren among plain groups is the experience meeting. No other plain group observes this as a regular part of worship. In the River Brethren oral tradition, the meeting is often mentioned as a symbol of continuity with the founding of the group. As Laban Brechbill described it, "the Old Order River Brethren . . . have what they call experience meetings. This is believed to have originated from those early (now called prayer meetings by others) meetings. They told of how it was when they recognized their sins and their fear of eternal damnation. This caused them to plead to God for forgiveness. By this they received pardon and found peace with God. Each member repeated their experience in the presence of the unconverted, this caused the unconverted to desire such a freedom from sin and to fellowship with such God fearing, God praising humble Christians. No doubt, then as now, at each meeting part of the time was spent by the members telling of God's influence with them individually" (Brechbill 1972:34).

Their crisis conversion experience and trine immersion baptism may be said to be distinctive, but not necessarily unique. Originally, the crisis conversion experience differentiated the River Brethren from the Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren (Dunkers), but nineteenth-century revivalism brought the emphasis on crisis conversion to these groups as well; only the Old Order groups rejected it. Trine immersion baptism is also characteristic of Brethren (Dunker) groups. But crisis conversion is eminently meaningful in River Brethren theology, because the group does not employ revival techniques to bring about conversion. Instead, preachers emphasize that sinners must repent and confront their sins, unworthiness, and the alternatives of heaven and hell. The process of entrance into the community comes through the "second birth" into the fellowship of Christ, the conviction that the church is a "new society" (Schrag 1964:351). River Brethren are Biblicists who stress voluntary church membership, adult baptism, obedience to

the New Testament commandments, separation of church and state, nonresistance, forswearing of oaths, and nonconformity to the world expressed through the gathered, disciplined church.

River Brethren have underscored particular aspects of Pauline theology (Hostetler 1974–75:14). This emphasis has resulted in religious traditions that center on Paul's admonitions, in Corinthians, concerning women—admonitions that included women's compliance and submission to men as part of the divine order; the concept of "headship" (which delineates the order of obedience as: God, Christ, man, woman, and child); and women's wearing of the head covering as a sign of submission to this order (1 Cor. 11:1–15 KJV).

The doctrine that River Brethren women and men refer to as "headship" focuses on women's head coverings. Headship dictates gender roles, and dress reinforces these roles. Women's and men's spheres of work may partially overlap, but headship determines gender roles in the division of labor and attitudes toward childbearing and child rearing. Men and women mutually discuss any problems that arise, but men make final decisions. The primary role for women is taking care of their families, and their jobs generally do not take them far from the house. Men's sphere of work, on the other hand, ranges beyond the home.

The religious practice of the Old Order River Brethren community is based on face-to-face relationships, so-called high-context social interaction (Hall 1976). An example of this deep commitment in the Church of the Brethren (Dunkers) comes from Jonathan Stayer's description of the love feast as a "family reunion" in both a literal and figurative sense (Stayer 1984–85:65). This description also applies to the weekly River Brethren experience meeting, for the feelings expressed in the testimony are painfully intimate, so much so that only within the context of a loving family could the individuals expose their weaknesses in this way. Members possess an unquestioning trust of the group. The participants in the love feast celebrations and weekly testimonies thus "collapse the division between private and public domains of life" and between the secular and the religious—rendering all of living holy, and making the group a peoplehood, the earthly embodiment of the love of Christ (Stayer 1984–85:64). A religious custom that reinforces the boundary-maintaining mechanisms of the love feast is the Lord's Supper, which is closed to outsiders. The bread and cup of communion, footwashing, and the holy kiss are for members of the church only. Women's breadmaking, a uniquely gendered ritual, is another

significant boundary-maintaining mechanism that sets this group apart from other Anabaptist plain sects.

In keeping with Scripture and the *Ordnung,* deviant or disobedient behavior soils the purity of the redemptive community, and the group therefore can purge disobedient and deviant members through the disfellowship of the ban (a ritualized form of social avoidance), excommunication, and, ultimately, expulsion from the group. The River Brethren, however, do not practice the ban. Those who are excommunicated are not greeted with a holy kiss and do not take part in the love feast, but no restrictions exist on socializing or eating together.

From the viewpoint of social function rather than Scripture, the River Brethren emphasize obedience, the underpinning element of the River Brethren faith, because the survival of the group depends upon each individual's observance of the outward signs of cohesion (such as appropriate dress, hair covering, and beard and hair length). Yet in practice, members recognize latitude given in areas of dress and other areas of nonconformity.

The River Brethren implicitly practice obedience to church elders or ordained men, since they "look after your soul." Yet the elders do not explicitly say that members are to be obedient to them and they do not lay down rules by which the members must live. Obedience to God, the Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures is preached quite often. Preachers often refer to the idea that a true child of God will not feel like he or she *has* to do something in service to God, but he or she will *want* to be obedient to God.

The norm for the number of ordained men is one bishop, two ministers, and one deacon in each district, but the structure often varies, depending on the presence of older ordained men who need help. There is only one bishop in the Franklin County United Group, the Horse and Buggy Group, and in Iowa. In the Horst Group and in Iowa there is only one deacon. In the Lancaster district, one can find two bishops (one senior and one younger); two ministers for each congregation; and two or three deacons who will preach when the need arises (Lloyd Dietrich 1995d; J. Snyder 1996). Spiritual depth, rather than education, is the criterion for holding these church offices.

The River Brethren choose bishops and ministers carefully, based upon personal piety and purity of life, depth of belief, and knowledge of the Scriptures; speaking ability is not a critical factor. Bishops have oversight of the church, make decisions, and preside over meetings. Individual members look to them for spiritual advice and resolution of inner conflict. Bishops

also visit the sick, baptize new members, anoint the sick with oil, preside at marriages, and travel between districts. Ministers and bishops both deliver Sunday messages. Unlike the Amish, the River Brethren choose their church leaders by direct vote rather than by lot (Hostetler 1980:112–13).

Deacons visit with all the members of the congregation, gathering information on the spiritual welfare of the members and of the congregation as a group during the "spring visit" prior to the yearly council. They take care of the poor, call on the sick, and assist in the ministry. (John Snyder adds that the deacons "[took] all contributions from members and distributed it to the necessity of the Saints" [J. Snyder 1996].) Deacons also administer the "care and share" fund for hospital bills, coordinate mutual aid in cases of fire and disaster, conduct prayer meetings, and supervise youth group retreats.

Old Order River Brethren believe that religion should be part of every aspect of their lives, and they perceive Jesus' life and death as a model for meekness and humility (Hostetler 1992:6). After two hundred years of development, this small, plain sectarian group remains a faithful theological and spiritual heir to the original River Brethren group that Jacob Engel brought together in eighteenth-century Lancaster County.

Old Order River Brethren Identity

The Old Order River Brethren arose out of what scholars call an agrarian "folk society." That is, the River Brethren society is a tradition-centered one with a Biblicist outlook (Olshan 1994c). The group is bound by a community of faith, centered on family and congregation, and partially isolated from other social groups in a rural agrarian setting (Redekop, Ainlay, and Siemens 1995:215, 217).

In forming this folk society, the Old Order River Brethren are not that different from other Old Orders, many of which are larger in number. One way in which they have maintained their identity among other groups (with which they have frequently been confused) is their collective memory of church leaders, who in oral tradition often take the roles of folk heroes. Most Old Order River Brethren share narratives of particular individuals who stand out as especially devout or capable leaders. Close kin or friends recount legends about charismatic individuals at church gatherings; they

remember bishops and preachers, especially devout, who possessed special talents or distinguished personalities as ministers. They recall, for example, pious but strong-minded Bishop Joseph Strickler (1797–1879); Preacher Jacob J. Wenger (1831–1909), known for meekness and humility; and Bishop "Daddy" Christian H. Myers (1848–1926), whose example was strict separation from the world. These traditions suggest that Old Order River Brethren's attachment to the group was also emotional, a common link to the collective memory that bonds the community.

The Old Order River Brethren have been called both "traditional" and "modern" by outsiders. Their plain dress and theological principles appear to members of other Old Orders to be conservative, while their selective use of technology suggests progressivism. From an analytical viewpoint, they blend their traditional society with a self-conscious awareness of choice, which, as Marc Olshan has argued, is the essence of modernity.[23] Instead of using the categories of "traditional" and "modern" as guides for what will be behaviorally tolerated, though, the Old Order River Brethren refer to activities they avoid, activities that are "proud," "materialistic," or "evil." They selectively choose modern technologies but restrict their use to practicality, as their publication indicates: "Technological developments are generally adopted as they are useful and practical. Members do guard against materialism by avoiding conspicuous consumption and public entertainment" (*Old Order River Brethren* n.d.). Stephen Scott has questioned the concept of modernity for the Old Orders, challenging the term "modern" itself. "What is 'modern' anyway?" he recently asked. "The Old Order Amish are quite modern compared to Americans living in 1850. The Amish have been very cautious in their adoption of technology but all Amish groups have modernized in some respect in the last hundred years. The propane gas appliances used in Lancaster Amish homes are twentieth-century innovations, mantle lamps only go back to about 1900 and the simpler kerosene lamps to about 1860" (Scott 1999).

Technology is not the only testing ground of modernity. Another important area in which the River Brethren are considered both traditional and modern is in the involvement of women in the community. While the preference for traditional domestic roles by women appears conservative, women have more of a role in religious life than in most Old Orders. Women have connections to the family and home as a center for spirituality—and indeed as a foundation for the community. The River Brethren discuss these matters not as issues of modernity or tradition, but as different responses to interpretations of Scripture.

The River Brethren have attracted analytical attention because they appear to defy easy categorization as a plain group, but there are comparisons that could be made. Indeed, in their eclectic origins in the Brethren (Dunker), Mennonite, and Brethren in Christ faiths, influenced by Pietism, the Old Order River Brethren could be characterized as an American overlay of German Protestant traditions, or a "religious bricolage" (Davis 1991:797). Often confused by outsiders with the Old Order Amish because of their outward appearance, the River Brethren are similar in many ways to Old German Baptist Brethren, Brethren (Dunkers), Weaverland Conference Mennonites, Beachy Amish, and other groups whose members have accepted cars, electricity, and other forms of modern technology but have retained plain dress, separation from worldly entertainment, a cappella singing, nonsalaried ministry, prohibition of divorce and remarriage, and many other behaviors that demonstrate nonconformity to the world. Among plain group members, River Brethren are distinguished by certain rituals that they have devised, such as the experience meeting and breadmaking service. To outsiders, the combination of plainness and acceptance of technology raises questions about the consistency of their philosophy. Reflecting the influence of mass culture in the United States, many observers marvel at their ability to persist as a traditional community despite their tiny membership.

To be sure, as one of the smallest Old Order groups, the River Brethren feel vulnerable and resist being submerged beneath better-known plain communities. Among themselves, the River Brethren recognize that their own distinctive customs and beliefs set them apart, and they are well aware that they are frequently confused with the Amish and the Old Order Mennonites. But gender figures centrally in their own perception of their role among plain groups. River Brethren believe that their treatment and perceptions of women are more egalitarian than those of other plain groups. They maintain breadmaking and women speaking at experience meeting as women's rituals unique among the plain orders. In addition, they refer to the greater emotional intensity in their worship practices than in those of the Mennonites or Amish. The quiet emotionalism of men's and women's solo testimony, especially, is infused with a deep remorse for perceived transgressions against their neighbors (Beam 1992). By means of these customs, the River Brethren have maintained their separate identity through two hundred years of struggle.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Religious persecution by the civil government and state church was an important factor in the mass migration of Germans to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The migration of thousands of Swiss Mennonites began in 1683 and lasted for over two hundred years (Redekop 1989:16). Even larger numbers of German Lutherans and Reformed came to Pennsylvania during this time.

2. Boehm served particular congregations, though he did travel to others.

3. One of Boehm's congregations was located along the Susquehanna River. This group drew away from Boehm due to his lenient views on baptism and relationships with folk of non-Mennonite views. The congregation is believed to be the parent congregation of the River Brethren (Wittlinger 1978:20).

4. During the 1990s, the group began to show more interest in its history. In September 1999, Stephen Scott reported to Simon Bronner that "we recently had a well attended series of meetings on our history." Scott and Myron Dietz have been assigned to write a section on the Old Order River Brethren in the *Brethren in Christ Encyclopedia.*

5. In his classic work, *The German and Swiss Settlements of Colonial Pennsylvania,* Oscar Kuhns has placed the date of origin in 1776 (Kuhns 1971:179). Since the deed to the Engel property was dated 1775, and early meetings were reputedly held in the house on the property, this date seems a likely origin (see Reynolds 1993).

6. The members of this society first called themselves simply "Brethren," derived from the Scriptures. In time, they became known in the United States as "River Brethren." The names "New Brethren" and "New Mennonites" also applied to them, distinguishing them from the "Old Brethren," or Dunkers. They were also known as "River Mennonites"—a term that distinguished them from the Mennonites—as a result of their location close to the Susquehanna. The term "River" referred to their location, rather than the place of baptism. Early tradition holds that they baptized in the Conoy Creek, Donegal Township, Lancaster County (see Wittlinger 1978:25–29).

7. While many of these itinerant preachers were Scotch-Irish, some Germans ministered as well; a notable example was Jacob Gruber, a Pennsylvania native of Pennsylvania German extraction (see Frantz 1994 and Boyd 1967:31).

8. See 1 Kings 17:1 KJV. The implication is that Brinser was a charismatic figure, reminiscent of Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, in spirit and appearance.

9. The first generation of River Brethren was a mixture of birthright River Brethren, Mennonites, Dunkers, and barn revival converts. With the deaths of Jacob Engel in 1832 and Conoy-Donegal bishop Jacob Strickler in 1842, perhaps the leadership of the River Brethren had difficulty with "progressive firebrands" like Matthias Brinser (*U.Z.: A History* 1981:13).

10. This is a reference to the division in Franklin County over leadership roles and the relaxation of orthodoxy in the John Hess case (Brechbill 1972:38).

11. The German word *fressen* means "to eat like a pig." Another English translation of Brinser's phrase might read, "They will sometime eat [like a pig] what they now vomit."

12. The Conoy congregation accepted the Sunday School movement, missions, political participation, and the use of litigation toward the end of the nineteenth century. There is dispute, however, over whether the Conoy group is what became known as the Brethren in Christ.

13. The evidence for these claims lies in family diaries that relate daily events and are work-centered. Many entries detail the use of technological advances, especially in farming practices.

14. As of September 1999, the Old Church in Franklin County was known as the Horse and Carriage Group or Horse and Buggy Group. It has only seventeen aging members.

15. Stephen Scott provided these figures during my interview with him on November 23, 1992.

16. The term "culture," used here by a member, refers to the plain dress and the close community of the River Brethren.

17. "English" is an expression used by plain people to refer to those who—ethnically and religiously—are *not* of German, Brethren, Amish, or Mennonite background.

18. Brother James recalls the presence of strong youth groups when he was young. He explains, "When they marry, young folk usually draw away and form their own groups. There was a period when there were no youth groups, but in the last five years, there is an active one. However, they are almost ready to marry, so they will probably repeat the pattern" (James Dietrich 1992d).

19. The use of the word "culture" has yet another meaning to the River Brethren. In this usage, it refers in a negative way to the influences of the dominant society that undermine River Brethren values.

20. There were 108 people at the spring love feast at the Sonlight River Brethren School in 1992. Large numbers prohibited meeting in a private home for love feast, so the school was the only sensible alternative. Still, some members worried that having the love feast in the nontraditional setting of the schoolhouse might lead to giving up traditional house and barn meetings.

21. Obstacles prevent the reunification of the Horst and United Groups, though, including their differences over dress. The United Group insists that women should wear a shawl and bonnet, while the Horst Group allows women to wear plainly made coats and bonnets if they choose. The United Group in Lancaster County is nearly as conservative in dress as the Horst Group. The biggest difference is between the Franklin and Iowa United districts of the United and Horst Groups.

22. Richard Beam has described this blend as being much more intensely spiritual than that achieved by other plain groups; its essence is very difficult to convey (Beam 1992).

23. Olshan has defined modernity as a "collective self-awareness" (Olshan 1994c:188).

2

Coverings for the Body

The Symbolism of Plain Women's Dress

When I first became acquainted with the River Brethren, a male member of the group—attempting to describe its characteristics—redirected my question about the group's "modernity" to its "plainness." As if uttering a proverb, he replied, "Oh, we're modern; we just dress plain" (Cain 1992).[1] The idea of avoiding modernity meant less to him than his commitment to plainness. His comment opened up to scrutiny the common assumption that restriction of new technology and acceptance of plain dress are integrally linked. (This assumption may arise from the fact that the Amish, the best-known group of plain people, practice both.) For the River Brethren, they constitute separate issues. Most River Brethren members do not see the linkage of modern technology and plainness as an inconsistency. As Stephen Scott has remarked, "each group has to determine where to draw the line between the church and the world, and obviously, the line is drawn at many different places" (Scott 1999).

River Brethren embody in plain dress the passage from Scripture, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17 KJV).[2] Dress is the only readily observable sign of separation from the world in the

Old Order River Brethren group[3]—unlike the Amish, who have the additional highly visible symbol of separation, the horse-drawn buggy. The River Brethren define "the world" as the global system controlled by the "forces of evil or the monolithic other" (Scott 1999). Some plain groups, such as the Old Order River Brethren, believe that they are separate by their dress, and may not define technology as one of the forces of evil. In this regard, probably the most quoted passage for plain groups is from Rom. 12:2, which states, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Plain dress can be, as John Hostetler has pointed out for the Amish, a religious "expression of obedience to God and of 'protest' to the proud and disobedient world." Socially, it unifies the community even as it differentiates among its members. Hostetler observes that for the Amish, for example, "the garb not only admits the individual to full fellowship but also clarifies his age, sex, and position within his society" (Hostetler 1980:234).

Plain dress gives River Brethren women a clearly defined sense of identity within the group. However, plain dress also imparts "marginality" in relation to the larger society. The concept of being marginal stems from the group's self-perception of its being apart from the dominant American culture. Even though the conventional perception is that American society is ethnically and racially diverse, Old Order River Brethren regard mainstream American culture as a monolithic "other," a godless force that threatens to engulf the group by assimilation. Old Order River Brethren are marginal to American society inasmuch as that host society regards them as a "fringe" group existing on the edges of the dominant culture.

This chapter describes the traditional dress of men and women, distinguishing the dress of Old Order River Brethren from that of other plain groups. My data from interviews with River Brethren women express two major cultural themes—dress as women's bonding for cohesion, and women's dress as shared social control, creating boundaries to ensure cultural survival. My study was limited, however, by a lack of historical information on dress from 1770–1880. No archives or museums exist to show historic Old Order River Brethren dress and its changes over time. The scarcity of photographs after 1880 also hampered a historic analysis of River Brethren dress. I have therefore relied on ethnographic techniques to gather my data, since codes of behavior are passed on orally in this group. I gathered my evidence on dress through directly observing the clothes women wore, reading family diaries, and interviewing informants about plain dress and their attitudes toward it.

My fieldwork included attendance for four years at breadmaking preparatory services and love feasts as well as conversations with River Brethren women in their homes. I assessed men's attitudes toward women and dress in men's religious discourse (transcribed from audiotapes of the services). I interviewed ordinary housewives and drew upon the insights of one woman in particular, a freelance writer, who has published magazine and news articles concerning River Brethren dress. I observed women in ritual settings on occasions when proper dress was paramount (e.g., ritual and life passage events), and in informal home settings, where dress was less ceremonial. My data challenge the common stereotypes about women in plain groups—that plain women are prudish in their intimate relationships, that plain dress and plain groups remain static, and that Old Order River Brethren men exercise absolute control over women.[4]

Old Order River Brethren Dress: An Overview

In plain dress, the width or narrowness of an item of clothing expresses orthodoxy in ways that can be baffling to outsiders. Variations of dress that are acceptable in one group might well be a flaunting of authority in another. For example, some groups of Mennonites and the Amish indicate degrees of conservatism by the width of cap strings and apron strings. They use "tied or loose" covering strings as signs of commitment in women's dress. I overlooked such details until I began to listen to women talk about their dress.

Before analyzing women's attitudes toward clothing and the significance of these details, however, an overview of both men's and women's plain dress in the Old Order River Brethren may be useful. River Brethren men's wear includes a broad-brimmed hat of straw or felt. Men wear store-bought jackets, usually black or gray. For formal occasions, they use a frock coat with a standing collar and no outside pockets. Men don broadfall pants[5] with a broad buttoned flap at the front, and fasten it just below the waistband in front with four to six small buttons. River Brethren consider suspenders appropriate for a plain appearance, although some men use belts, especially for everyday work.

Men's shirts are long-sleeved for church, but short-sleeved shirts are typical for warm weather or work. Old Order River Brethren men do not wear a necktie, because they consider it an adornment. Without a coat or tie, the long-sleeved shirt marks River Brethren nonconformity. For more formal occasions, River Brethren men don vests that have a standing collar. The more conservative the individual, the more frequently vests are worn (Scott 1993b). Orthodox men prefer high-laced black shoes for dress, although brown shoes are frequently worn for work. Some men wear the simpler styles of store-bought, everyday "outside" work clothes. This type of clothing allows male members of the group to blend in with dominant society relatively easily. The same cannot be said of women's dress, however.

Especially noticeable on the woman is the head covering, worn consistently over uncut hair. As Stephen Scott points out, "the woman's head covering is regarded as a biblical ordinance and not just another item of clothing" (Scott 1996:228). The significant practice of wearing the head covering is based on the New Testament, 1 Cor. 11:1–16, especially verses 3 and 5: "the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man . . . every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head" (ibid.).

River Brethren do not consider men's hair, unlike women's hair, as a head covering. Men groom their hair according to the same Scriptures that prescribe women's hair grooming. Men believe that long hair is a shame to them. As a matter of simplicity and uniformity, their hair is parted in the center and cut straight across the back, just below the ear. Most men do not trim their beards, but instead allow them to grow unrestrained. Some feel that the Bible enjoins men not to "round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard" (Lev. 19:27 KJV).

Old Order River Brethren men traditionally associate mustaches with the military, and they, as pacifists, eschew them. Some Brethren also consider the mustache unclean, though they wear a full beard. Many men believe that God intended men to have beards as a symbol of manhood. Shaving the beard off is seen as an act of rebellion against God's creation. For this reason, some men allow their mustaches to grow, considering the mustache part of the God-given beard. Elaborating on the role of the beard, one member told a story of an outsider who asked one brother, "Why do you have a beard?" The brother replied, "Why do you have a nose?" (Lloyd Dietrich 1995b). This brother considered the beard as much a part of his countenance as his other features.

Fig. 3 These sketches of Old Order River Brethren dress show, for women, the head covering of opaque white cotton and the black or occasionally gray bonnet and black shawl. The upper bodice (or "shortgown") includes a "frill" sewed to it at the back. In past decades these were two separate pieces. Weekday dress material consists of small checks or subtle plaids, but Sunday wear is usually plain gray, brown, blue, or dark green. Men wear broad-brimmed, black felt hats for winter or straw hats of a similar shape for summer. The plain-style frock coat is gray or black, rarely blue or brown. The vest, with a standing collar, is also worn, sometimes without the coat. Suspenders usually accompany the broadfall trousers, especially on Sundays. Courtesy of *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* (July 1978) and Stephen Scott.

For women in the Old Order River Brethren, there is one dress standard for modesty. Unlike Mennonite groups, which allow the individual congregations to decide standards of dress, there is no significant range in adherence to dress standards among River Brethren women. As Sister Rebecca explained to me, "If you're looking for significance in little details you're probably not going to find it. We all have a standard, a main way we know how to dress, it's not necessarily how the exact pattern is, but what is most important [the reason for wearing the dress]" (Witmer 1995). New Testament Scripture gives

Image not available

Fig. 4 River Brethren man at a roadside vegetable stand, with his wife in the background (showing the back of the "cape"). Photograph by Lorin Reynolds.

River Brethren women guidelines for restraint in dress: "that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9–10 KJV).

Standard dress for River Brethren women is the "cape dress," which they create at home using electric sewing machines to stitch the fabric from their own homemade dress patterns. Old Order River Brethren women wear the same basic dress pattern for all occasions. Since the pattern is identical for all Old Order River Brethren women, aesthetics in women's dress center mainly on the choice of fabric and color. For social occasions—such as for church or for going away—sisters may change from an "everyday" dress into a "good" one. One sister recently received a gift of fabric for her birthday. When I asked her how many dresses were sufficient for a wardrobe, she replied that she needed about six to start, although she planned to make extras.

Self-expression and aesthetic expression in appearance are not considered important by the Old Order River Brethren. The group considers

cosmetics, jewelry, and clothing for adornment superfluous, citing Scriptures that say that devout women should not tamper with what God has created perfect. Accordingly, some women wear wristwatches as a matter of practicality, not adornment, but they abstain from wearing jewelry (including wedding rings).

Sister Jane maintains that such bodily adornment excites the physical passions and restricts the spiritual side of both wearer and beholder. Jane reifies this concept of woman's plain dress as protection from carnal temptation: "When people see me, there's a protection in the covering. If I was walking down the street in short shorts, I would be much more of a target for men. Who's going to come along and get me [in my plain clothing]? Just simply walking with the Lord, and when you are under submission and have the lordship of the Lord over you, I think that's a sort of protection, the umbrella of protection over you, and I think I feel that" (J. Dietrich 1995).

Old Order River Brethren women observe that their muted, plain dress is a woman's witness. Several women emphasize that the muted shades and the uniformity of dress actually draw attention to the countenance as a form of witness.

> Is there a message in one's appearance? Yes, I think that when they see me they can tell that there's something different . . . and I think a lot of people know what I stand for, and even if they don't, I would hope by my dress—the world stresses the dress, and it would call attention to the dress and away from the face—but I would hope they would see my countenance and my peacefulness really, that with a plain dress—and that's why it's called plain, because it's not showy or fancy—that they would maybe draw attention to my countenance which is from the Lord. In other words, [it] would draw them to Christ. It's a witness to Christ without even saying anything. (ibid.)

> We're supposed to have a meek and quiet spirit, something I have to work on a lot. In the sight of God it's of great price, it's worth a lot. So that's why our clothes . . . we don't have any rules saying your belt may be only so wide, etc. That's why I'm saying we have no written rules, and that's why I'm saying it's actually a freedom because we have an understanding, we know how it's supposed to be, it's modest. . . . We try not to compare with others [moderns]. (Witmer 1995)

Sister Rebecca testifies about the silent witness of dress, but points emphatically to clothing as a body covering. "We're supposed to adorn ourselves with good works. These clothes are not good works, they're just something to cover my body" (ibid.). She emphasizes that plain dress draws attention away from the female form:

> I feel more comfortable in [plain dress] because it doesn't draw attention to my body so much and then people can focus on your face. The eye is the light of the body, the Bible says. Your eyes are what tell most about you. I look at people's eyes a lot. I think your spirit comes out in your facial expression, in your eyes. And that's what you want people to see. God's spirit coming through you. You don't want people to be focusing on clothes. In my dress, I hope that people can see Jesus and know that I'm a child of God. (ibid.)

The cape dress embodies modesty for River Brethren women. Hemlines vary, but a common standard is midway between ankle and knee (although younger women have opted recently for a longer dress length). The dress consists of a long, gathered or pleated skirt sewn onto the waistband of the long-sleeved, high-necked bodice. Since the cape covers the dress front, it also conceals buttons, zippers, or snaps that fasten the dress bodice underneath the cape. Snaps or pins secure the cape front opening. The points of the triangular cape are sewn fast to the apron waistband in the front. One point of the cape extends down the back, and either hangs loose or is tucked into the back waistband. A portion of the bodice that extends below the apron band is known as the peplum, or "frill," as most River Brethren women refer to it. Most women wear dress sleeves full length, to the wrist, or no less than three-quarter length.

These details of dress differ from those of some Lancaster County Amish women, who wear their hemlines at about knee-length and their sleeves shortened above the elbow. Sister Deborah points out that in these aspects of dress, Old Order River Brethren are more conservative than the Amish, who are popularly thought to be the most orthodox in dress. This seems to be a point of considerable significance to the group.

River Brethren women wear the cape to cover the neckline and bosom and to provide modesty for nursing. The cape fully covers the bodice, and some women fashion it to lap over the shoulders a few extra inches. Others vary the width of the cape for greater modesty. The "half apron" (or waistband

apron) and the bib apron for work are the types most commonly worn over the dress. Originally used as a protection for other clothing, the apron became a symbol of servitude and, eventually, a covering for modesty (Rupel 1994:6). The apron and the cape are worn to conceal the lines of the female form. A sister is never seen in public without her apron. Many Amish wear aprons of contrasting material to emphasize the separate character of each garment (Scott 1986:90). The Old Order River Brethren cape and apron are of matching material. Most River Brethren women sew the cape and apron together (a progressive practice, compared to the Amish and members of other groups, who pin them together). Old Order River Brethren women fasten the apron at the waist with a belt or sash that extends from one side all the way around the waist to the opposite side. They attach the sash at the side of the waist by a hook or pin.

In my time with the River Brethren, I only heard one narrative pointing to the apron as a symbolic garment. At the ingathering on November 17, 1995, members offered "old time" life testimonies, where they recounted their progression from childhood innocence to conviction of sin, then to crisis conversion and the spiritual journey beyond conversion through life. In her narrative, one woman mentioned that on one occasion, when she was in her bedroom, she was overcome with fear of Satan. She dropped to her knees and pulled her apron over her head and began to pray for deliverance. The experience she related demonstrated that this sister considered the apron a "protection" and a refuge from evil, as well as a traditional garment meant for women's modesty.

River Brethren women and men do not consider the "cap" or "prayer veil"—or, as Old Order River Brethren prefer to call it, the "covering"—apparel. Rather, they regard it as an outward indication of women's piety in this apostolic order. To the sisters, this is the most symbolic part of the individual's plain dress. For River Brethren, the covering invokes a blessing from God; therefore, women are never without it. "Sincere seekers" wear the covering as an indication of their intent to join the River Brethren fellowship: "[B]ut I do think that everyone who reads the Bible with an open mind will eventually come to certain principles that they will follow, of modesty, that the Bible does teach to cover the head, if they are sincere seekers" (Witmer 1995).

The religious significance of the covering as a marker of women's piety is readily apparent to Old Order women, but progressive Mennonite groups have referred to the covering as the "women's question," acknowledging its

symbolic significance as well.[6] The Old Order River Brethren covering is made with a crown and a front piece that extends over each ear. The covering, gathered and tightened by a drawstring at the back, has a three-inch frontlet, although some women enlarge the brim to cover the head to the hairline.

Over time, in many plain groups, the covering became much smaller than the original pattern. Some Mennonite women wear a beanie-shaped covering or skullcap (Scott 1986:100–101). For some groups, it has been reduced to a small, lacy "doily" worn over long hair, dressed hair, or bound hair. River Brethren sisters have reached a consensus that "proper" plain dress, particularly the covering, is a woman's sacred duty: "I think I can speak for all of us, that we do not feel that this is the only, perfect way of dress. But it's the way we've chosen as a group, to continue to dress in a way that we feel can be modest, that we feel can fulfill what the Bible teaches" (Witmer 1995).

Sisters assert their obedience to the meanings of the covering—even through the type of fabric constituting the covering. Most plain groups wear a "gauzy," net-like covering; the women of the Old Order River Brethren are among the few who wear a covering that is opaque.[7] In most Amish communities, at least for church services, married women wear white coverings and single girls and young women are attired in black coverings. To River Brethren women, the whiteness of the covering represents purity, and they stress the importance of the opaqueness of muslin fabric as a witness. Although (as an outsider) I might have easily overlooked this seemingly small detail, Sisters Jane and Rebecca explained its significance to me:

> The cap is very unique. Opaque. The Bible says "covered" and therefore, you cannot see through it, so it is covered. I remember a preacher, I don't even know if it was River Brethren, said, "C-o-v-e-r-e-d means covered!" When you can see through a covering, it [the hair] is not covered. (J. Dietrich 1995)

> I feel very strongly that it would have to be opaque. . . . Because I feel that your hair should be as completely covered as your body, and some of these netting coverings, I would definitely not put anything like that on my body. You can see right through it. It [the covering] would have to be opaque so you can't see through it. (Witmer 1995)

Most Old Order River Brethren women keep about three to four coverings, changing about once per week. The women fuss over the snowy white color of the coverings, and some women starch them by stretching the crown over a two-quart jar. They then iron the covering across the jar top to keep the "bun" shape of the crown. To preserve the whiteness of the covering, many women don a scarf in lieu of the covering for work in the yard, garden, or barnyard.

River Brethren women recognize that their hair as well as clothing functions as a body covering. River Brethren women regard tampering with their hair as meddling with God's perfect creation. Scripture specifically forbids these women from cutting the hair of their heads. River Brethren women do not wear their long hair hanging loose, open to the gaze of the world. As young girls, they grow very long, unshorn tresses by the time they begin wearing the covering. Until they don the covering, girls wear their hair in one or two braids, which they sometimes loop and fasten at the back of the head. Upon taking the covering, women part their hair in the center, binding the long hair into a knot or bun, which they conceal under the crown of the covering. The River Brethren woman never appears without her covering from then on.

For River Brethren folk who regard spirituality above carnality, pride in one's appearance is false pride and therefore sinful. Sisters believe that covering the body in uniform dress permits them to focus on spiritual matters and to spend time more profitably. For River Brethren, clothing is worn to de-emphasize the body. They believe that women's plain attire shields the cultural outsider from being attracted to the physical form of the wearer. Plain dress is thus a protection from carnality for both the outsider and the plain woman.

Dressing for Age

The garb integrates members in the River Brethren and distinguishes them from other groups, but it also serves to differentiate among women within the group by designating life stages. One can determine what place a woman occupies in the River Brethren social system by examining minor differences in plain garb. There are variations from prescribed garb that

conformed to the life cycle among women. These visual markers of age act as distinctions or even barriers between Old Order River Brethren age groups. (Younger women generally tend to make changes in the garb more readily than those in other age groups.)

Foot coverings are one aspect of clothing that distinguishes age groups. For example, in the summer, it is not uncommon to see young women wearing modest black sandals over their heavy-gauge black stockings. Unlike the Amish, adult River Brethren women are seldom clad in sneakers in public. River Brethren children, however, sport sneakers and other, more conservative "modern" children's shoe styles. A few young women adopt the "flat" for church—a modest style of dress shoe, plain, dark, with a flat heel. They also wear lighter shades and lighter-gauge black hose. Many mature women put on a conservative, black, casual, "moccasin" type of slip-on shoe with a low heel, and some elderly women use the traditional black oxford lace-up shoe. A wide range of adult women also have an orthopedic type of black shoe for everyday use or for going away.

Mature women put on a black bonnet over the prayer covering and a shawl for "going out." The bonnet is usually the first item of clothing to go when a church relaxes its dress standards. Some young River Brethren girls have abandoned the bonnet and shawl for conventional dark coats, wearing just the covering without the bonnet.

Dress color is another facet of adaptation to aging in women's plain garb. Most Old Order River Brethren women are predominantly attired in unpatterned, muted shades of light or slate blue, although dark blues or royal blues are preferred among women in their twenties to maturity. Aged women choose black or very dark shades of brown, gray, or navy for the cape dress, shawl, or cardigan sweater. Younger women wear a rainbow of "quiet," "heather" shades of blue, peach, lavender, green, brown, or gray (never black, yellows, reds, or oranges). The little girls are often adorned in soft pastel colors. Old Order River Brethren women commonly hold the view that bright colors and patterns are to be avoided, because it is "better not to draw attention to yourself."

Women use their hair, like their clothing, to distinguish between age groups. At the onset of physiological puberty for girls, braided or loose hair takes on overtones of allure and adornment. One woman recounts how older sisters monitor modesty in their little girls' hair: "Our little girls usually wear braids, or one braid down the back. But then usually you don't put it up until you take the covering. We would encourage, hopefully by that

time, that they would wear it up, even if they don't wear the covering. Most girls take the covering by twelve, thirteen" (J. Dietrich 1995). Thus, hair and clothes serve as a boundary between little girls and young girls who have attained the status of "women" by binding their hair under the covering and wearing plain dress.

Individual women introduce new traditions in their attire that distinguishes them from other age groups within River Brethren culture. A group of River Brethren women in their twenties have created a notable exception to the maxim that older women are more conservative in dress. Contrary to the typical traditions of clothing, this group of young women dresses in more orthodox ways than middle-aged or aging River Brethren women. For example, some River Brethren women who took plain dress twenty-five or more years ago still wear their hems much shorter than the average River Brethren woman today. At home, dress is more casual for older women, who will shed the cape and exchange the covering for a scarf for working around the house and farm. These older women adopt small-patterned dress materials to wear in the home so that the dress does not show soil. Compared to these older women, whose attitudes toward apparel are more casual, younger women differ in their appearance and in the strictness of their dress observance. Minor variants in style thus reveal modifications in plain dress that differentiate one women's age group from another.

Change and Adaptation

The trend among young women to alter details of dress, making it more conservative, reveals their freedom to express their religiosity in clothing details. Although there is a recognition of standards of dress in the community, no one dictates or enforces expectations of dress. It is assumed that a devout member will want to look like the other brothers or sisters. Stephen Scott has remarked that the Old Order River Brethren "operate under a kind of honor system. Hopefully, women and men dress in the approved garb out of love and respect for the church, submission to the brotherhood, obedience to scriptural principles, and conviction from the Holy Spirit" (Scott 1999).

Some young sisters have altered their garb to achieve markedly increased orthodoxy. They want to observe specific details of modesty and conservatism in dress, especially in the width of the cape, the length of the skirt, and the wearing of the covering. Young women exhibit degrees of conservatism by widening the most significant visual symbol, the covering brim, to conceal more of the hair. Sisters concur, though, that moderate variations in traditional dress details are strictly a personal decision. "There are some girls who feel that the trend is more conservative, longer skirts. We talk about these kinds of things among ourselves. The fact that we don't have any rules contributes to that. We can't say, 'It's because our church does it that way.' You have to be strong in your own convictions, and you have to know why you're doing what you're doing" (Witmer 1995).

Sister Rebecca bases her dress decisions upon Scripture. She also utilizes River Brethren core values and virtues of women's piety and modesty to justify asserting her individualism in dress. Women state that the changes they make in dress details are not induced by self-pride. By altering the symbols of dress—the covering, the cape, the skirt length—these women declare their freedom to take charge of their orthodox appearance based upon the higher authority of holy writ, their consciences, and their own interpretation of the Scriptures. Old Order River Brethren women often speak about the "freedom" they feel in exercising this power: "Some people think, 'Oh, this is such a bondage.' It's not bondage, it's not bondage at all. It gives you freedom. You can't explain the freedom that you have when you are covered, when you are not exposing your body or your person to every man to look upon" (ibid.).

The sisters state that modesty in plain dress serves as the outward symbol of one's inward relationship to God and to divinely inspired headship. They frequently refer to headship as the divine order of which Saint Paul spoke, the order affecting relations between women and men: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3 KJV).

When asked whether she might change the covering in any way, Rebecca, who has already enlarged her frontlet, voices strong feelings about changing the covering to make it larger: "If I didn't belong to this group, I would wear a hanging veil that covers all of the hair. . . . If I were going to change my covering, the only other way I would think of would be a scarf that covered all my hair and came down to about here [*she gestures to the nape of the neck*]. It would be a full veil. It wouldn't be one of those little ones [that

other plain groups wear]" (Witmer 1995). Rebecca has pondered Saint Paul's prescriptions for dress and consequently interpreted Paul's injunctions as an imperative to enlarge the covering for greater obedience:

> Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Cor. 11:4–9 RSV)

Sister Rebecca diligently seeks to do what the Bible requires of a pious woman. She continually searches the Scriptures and studies concordances to find answers to the important question of how to dress to please God, not men.

> What prompted me with changing the covering? How do you know how much of your hair to cover? I decided whenever I come up with a question I can't answer, I feel that I have to study it [in the Bible]. "But if a woman have long hair it is a glory for her." I looked up "head." "Head" means the part that is easily seized or taken hold of. Well, I figure the part that's most easily taken hold of is the hair. If she does not have it uttermost covered or hidden, then she dishonoreth, or brings to shame, or puts to the blush, her head. Not only her physical head but her head above her, her husband, and God.
>
> I feel much more modest with the larger cut [covering], I do. Modest clothing is something that covers, that hides the shape and the form of your body. [It] hides what men would consider the glory, the beauty of the body, because God wants us to be a spiritual people. You know how our country is. The whole focus is on the body. You have to be thin, trim, athletic, you have to have a certain size bust, not too much on your hips, and that's your focus. OK, so someone gets married, the guy likes the girl, how she looks, she gets older, she is not as trim, maybe she is not capable of doing as much

> as she gets older. What happens? He is looking for someone younger and good looking. He leaves her, and that's not what God intended at all. You know, God gave us our bodies as a house for our spirits. And he means for us to . . . develop our spiritual relationships for this life and eternity. (Witmer 1995)

One brother tells me that River Brethren men are considering ways of redesigning the covering to conceal more of the hair. However, some River Brethren women have beaten them to the punch. Several sisters have independently initiated changes in the design of their covering to include a brim that conceals more of the hair. A woman's efforts to cover ever more hair announce to the world and to her sisters: "I will go to even greater lengths than my other sisters, by altering my dress, to demonstrate to the world that I am obedient to God and my community."

Frequently, young sisters discuss among themselves these changes in dress, connecting to each other and supporting each other within the accepted guidelines of men's monitoring of women's orthodoxy. Further, women claim the right to modify dress according to their own consciences as an expression of their religiosity. These deeds demonstrate that sisters bond among themselves to dramatize modifications in plain dress and in their approval of each other's individual decisions to enact these changes. Thus, plain dress does not remain static. Young River Brethren women initiate changes in women's dress that not only reflect age differences but also signify the freedom to make choices in dress details to express greater orthodoxy.

Social Functions of Plain Attire

Women's head coverings serve to sharpen gender boundaries; because the covering is a symbol shared only by women, their identity *as* women is more immediately visible. Recognizing that the covering is a symbol, one brother in sermon rhetoric specifically suggested that this item—not considered apparel, but a "sign," a symbol of piety—be called the "covering," which he considers the proper scriptural term.[8] Women's garments are far more carefully scrutinized by women and men in the community than men's

clothes are. Wearing the covering is an unwritten rule of dress in the community, part of the *Ordnung* that stems from scriptural directives.

> But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. (1 Cor. 11:5 KJV)

> Judge in yourselves; is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? (1 Cor. 11:13 KJV)

The more hair she covers, the more modest and orthodox the woman. River Brethren women consider the covering a visible commitment to prayer and to their relationship with God and God's creation order in headship: God, Christ, man, woman. It is worn when "praying or prophesying," and some women, like Sister Rebecca, even wear it to sleep.

> I do sleep with another covering on. I just feel more comfortable, any time I wake up that night, I might want to pray. You'd be surprised how often I pray in my sleep, especially if I'm going through a hard time. My mother and my father taught me that they felt like it's good to have it on in case anything happens that you could feel comfortable and pray any time. It's just the fact that so often I will think of something . . . prayer is an attitude, you don't just have to pray out loud. . . . By thinking about a friend in trouble, and just by thinking of that I'm almost, like, subconsciously talking to God. I don't even think that I'm praying, but I am, so therefore, it's best to have a covering. (Witmer 1995)

River Brethren women do not consider wearing the covering a woman's *choice*. The River Brethren regard this article of attire as a test of membership and a sign of submission to the collective. "It's understood that if you have a desire to be a member, you desire to be like your brothers and sisters . . . you don't have a desire to be individualistic" (ibid.).

Men's sermon rhetoric establishes the masculine viewpoint on where the real responsibility of headship rests: literally, on the heads of women. "Does the husband make himself head? The Bible establishes that he is head. Who's the one who puts that whole process into proper order? It's the wife. The husband lives as the head. He lives as the leader, as one going the way

before. But the wife is the one who establishes that relationship [through obedience and submission]" (Breadmaking Service Sermon 1994b).

The women's head covering is the keystone to preserving the social order between women and men, and it holds the community together. Discussing the "submission" conveyed by plain dress, women who remain in the culture speak approvingly of their position in River Brethren society. They typically express the view that plain dress embodies "freedom from the dictates of circumstance or outside authority" (Olshan and Schmidt 1994:223). In interviews, women stress the meaning of submission to God and to the community. Sister Jane, for example, elaborates on her view of freedom in "submission."

> It's a point of submission, to God, to my husband—mostly to God—and . . . to the community. Submission is the word I want to use. . . . [To the Lord], "Here I am, whatever you ask of me I will do." Now with my husband it's not like, OK, whatever you say I'll do. Because it's more like a *working together,* you know. Jacob will ask me, What do you think about this? It's not like, OK, this is what we're going to do—bam! But it's more, he does have final say. In other words, he's responsible, he's responsible for whatever happens, like decisions he makes and that takes a load off me. I don't have to think, oh boy, he's so much in charge that I can't do anything. I don't feel that way at all. It's a blessing that I don't have a lot of responsibilities that he has, even though I do have some say. But as far as the submission to the Lord, and it's just that, I am willing to do whatever. There's a great freedom in that, and that I don't have to worry about the consequences, you know, do whatever, and the consequences are His. (J. Dietrich 1995)

Rebecca is well aware of the women's movement in mass society, but emphasizes that women are not belittled in River Brethren society. Rather, they are living out a reasonable role from the biblical idea of headship. "Women being in subjection to their husband, that's something you don't see very much these days. You know, it's the women's lib. It's not that we believe that women are less, a lesser creature, but we believe God has made a headship, but we're just supposed to help the man and be in subjection to him" (Witmer 1995).

Humility does not require River Brethren women to undervalue themselves. Women refer to themselves as *partners* with their husbands. They do

not regard themselves as handmaids but as helpmates in life and in work. So-called women's work is valued and respected, and, concentrated in the family, is central to the culture (Olshan and Schmidt 1994:222). Besides signifying obedience and submission, plain dress symbolizes commitment, humility, and modesty (Scott 1986:4). When women don plain garb, they make a conscious choice to abide by the standards of the collective.

River Brethren sisters speak of the "power" afforded by women's covering and hair. Sister Rebecca refers, for example, to the covering as "the power on her head—the power is privilege, freedom, and liberty. And that's kind of neat" (Witmer 1995). Mennonite scholar Pamela Klassen has suggested that women who reject plain dress engender a loss of power in prayer to ensure the well-being of the family and community (Klassen 1995:24). Women's connection to God is in the head covering. The significance of the head covering is reinforced by its metaphorical use in the oft-repeated saying, "When the strings go, everything goes" (Weaver 1985:48). Klassen has explained the idea of the saying: once women relax standards of dress, the "purest of all metaphorical women, the Church, is at risk" (Klassen 1993).

Old Order River Brethren women have a unique interpretation of dress: they consider women's hair synonymous with plain dress. They refer to Scripture: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him. But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (1 Cor. 11:14–15 KJV). With this passage in mind, sisters and brothers regard women's long hair as a "glory," serving as a public marker of religious identity and as a personal symbol for women's roles.

That River Brethren women link the beauty of unshorn hair with sexual allure is evident from one sister's remarks:

> If a woman have long hair it is a glory to her. I looked up "hair" and it means to wear tresses of hair or to have long hair. If a woman has that, it's a glory. "Glory" means dignity, glory, honor, or praise to her, for her hair or the locks are given her for a covering. "Covering" means "given her so that she can cover it [hair]," so you don't want just everybody to see your glory. "Something that's thrown around one, to put on a mantle, a covering or vesture. . . ." It means that the hair should be covered, concealed, to cover the glory of it. I believe it is beauty. If you ask any man in the world, the man's going

Image not available

Fig. 5 A married River Brethren woman from York County, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Lorin Reynolds.

> to tell you that if the lady has beautiful hair that is one of her attractions. Especially a lady who has well-kept long hair. I think that it's something that they [men] are drawn to. And I think that's one reason why we wear the covering. (Witmer 1995)

Sister Jane, however, looks at the hair as exclusively the domain of the husband in the privacy of the bedroom, rather than taking a scriptural view of the hair as a spiritual covering.

> I don't wear the covering at night. Since I'm married, I let my hair down. I figure, I'm not praying and I'm not praying in public. I think of it more as the covering, as needing it when I'm praying in public. . . . So, at night that's my husband's. I mean, you know, the hair is supposed to be your glory, and so I don't cover it at night. A lot of it I guess is for my husband—he didn't ask me, he probably doesn't know that other people wear it [the covering] at night [*she laughs*]. (J. Dietrich 1995)

River Brethren women compare uncovered hair with a woman's nakedness. Sister Jane continues,

> We had a salesman who sells farm things, and almost every time he came I had my hair down. I thought, "Oh, I did feel a little funny," not that "Oh, I'm naked," it was just that, "Oh my, he probably thinks I never have my hair up." I know he knows I'm a plain woman, in my covering, but, I would feel like, "uh, let's get this hair up there." My hair would be a private thing just for my husband, and that's why I leave it down for him. I can sit on it, it's that long [*she gestures to her thigh*]. (ibid.)

By confining it inside the covering, River Brethren women believe that long hair communicates spiritual power and virtue, women's connection with God.

Sister Jane shares with me the sisters' common concern that their hair belongs to men. She emphasizes that her hair is not to be seen by other men, but solely by her husband. Hair language is a private symbol for River Brethren women and men: it defines woman's hair as her glory *and* as the possession of men.

There is a link between the hair, the covering, and the pressure placed on women to conform to the covering issue owing to her "disposition," her place in creation, and her suffering in birthing—"that she give herself in prayer and not evade her responsibility in child-bearing" (Epp 1990:253). Sister Jane, nursing her nine-month-old boy as her two other young sons play about her feet, makes the connection between childbearing and submitting to the authority of her husband and the Scriptures in these matters:

> The River Brethren haven't had large families of seven, eight, nine, ten children. Some have had at least six. Not too many are having nine and ten. But Jacob and I have changed after our third child, I guess. Those children were carefully planned. And then we did some reading about letting the Lord plan your family. What does the Bible say about having children? And every place I've read, a child was a blessing. You know in today's world, you know, they're so much work, they tie you down . . . and they do! It is work, it's major. But the Lord visited Hannah and she was given a child, you know, and it was the Lord that gives the babies. I thought, "Oh, this is funny, that we can just plan these children!" And so we kind of decided, "OK, Lord, whatever you want." . . . He (the husband) arrived at this choice first, and he would never have pushed me, because Jacob's not like that. . . . It took me a long time to come around, "OK, Lord." That has been a big change, a blessing. You know, I would have missed my last two children had I decided "OK, forget this." It is through my children that I have learned so much, you know, about being selfish. All my reasons for not having children were, you know, selfish reasons! It's the Lord that gives me the strength, I could never take care of six children, who can take care of six children? Every time, help has been given, I have a girl that comes in once a week. The Lord has provided. . . . I just totally changed, the Lord has just given ways, things I would never have been given had I not allowed the Lord to give me my children. Luke was born ten days before my fortieth birthday, and I just feel like he's been such a gift. I can hardly believe that the Lord has given us another baby, and he's just been such a gift. I just can hardly believe that He would do that for us. The Lord totally turned me around. I would have thought before, "Oh no, six children, another baby, how can you do this? Oh no, please!" It was a privilege, a gift that I didn't

> deserve. It's a big step of faith. Each baby, physically, carrying them, it's hard—you know, you're older. (J. Dietrich 1995)

Like dress, hair arrangement marks passage into the sexual world. Changes in ordering the hair that coincide with dressing plain indicate that hair arrangement is a mark of transition, a passage from childhood to adolescence for young girls. Although outside of the girls' awareness, the transition needs reinforcement from material symbols. When she binds the hair up and conceals it, the young girl can be seen as symbolically consecrating her hair to God and her person to her future husband. The young girl who secures her hair inside the covering is simultaneously and publicly moving away from the asexual and profane, being incorporated instead into the sexual and sacred worlds.

Thus, part of the transition for women from the profane to the sacred is embodied in the rearrangement of their hair. Jane recounts that during early adolescence, girls are encouraged to change the arrangement of their hair from braids or hanging free to binding it up, even if they have not yet taken a head covering. Bound hair serves to reinforce the social contract between Old Order River Brethren women and men. Binding their hair for men demonstrates women's cooperation with men in an act of social control. Women who fasten and conceal their hair uphold community values of modesty and gender control; moreover, they help preserve social distance from the host society.

In Old Order River Brethren speech, "making a beginning" for conversion involves plain dress. By having a testing period of wearing the garb and exhibiting orthodox behavior commensurate with the dress, its wearer demonstrates her intent to join the Old Order River Brethren group and undergo baptism. Women's dress is an outward marker of the wearer's sincere desire to embrace the River Brethren community as the controlling authority in living the faith and in monitoring personal behavior. For River Brethren women and men, "making a beginning" literally means the start of a lifelong journey "on the way" toward achieving redemption and an eternal place in the heavenly family of God.

In dressing plain, girls show their "spiritual maturity." This occurs among girls as young as nine years of age; for converts or transfer members, it might take place in their twenties or even after. The average time for this decision is around twelve or thirteen years of age. Sister Jane recalls the feminine bonding between mother and daughter that marks this transition: "And that

was a joy, for me to help her gather [her clothes]. . . . I got a bunch of my old dresses that I wore as a young girl, and they were still in good shape, and that was such a joy to get those things for her . . . it was just such a nice time. It was just like I was helping her 'along the way,' I . . . I don't know, it's just hard to put into words" (J. Dietrich 1995). For the mother, passing along her own dresses from her girlhood—the dresses she wore when she first became plain—is an unforgettable experience. Sharing and wearing the same dresses demonstrates the bonds of custom and tradition in dress that sustain the community and its values. "I'll always remember that. She didn't want to wear her plain clothes until the next Sunday. So it was all that week we got all these dresses, and she'd try them on and come over and show me. She got my covering too. . . . In summer those dresses fit her perfectly. The belt size almost fit—we hardly had to change anything. So, it was a whole month before we actually sewed her a new dress. She had all of mine" (ibid.).

River Brethren women demonstrate continuity between generations of women in sharing their experiences of adopting plain dress. By means of their traditional roles as advisors and sages, elderly women and mothers nurture and mentor the daughters and granddaughters who put on plain garb. They offer aid in sewing dresses and in gifts of cloth and clothing, bonding with younger women and girls and thus perpetuating the dress.

Aged women gain status as "sages" by being spiritually tested as they go through life. By passing through these life crises without formal social reproof, and by having families along the way, they became more traditional, taking on the mentor role. As sages, older women create bonds among sisters of all ages to assure the continuity of the dress. Indeed, they perpetuate the group as well as the dress. In narratives recalling her own experiences and in the act of recounting those narratives to the young, the older woman reifies her own dress choice and confirms her place in River Brethren society.

Sister Jane described her close bonds with her own mother and her grandmother when she chose plain dress at the age of fifteen.

> I didn't sew at fifteen, so my mother and grandmother . . . Grandma came out that day . . . it was a school day, and I didn't go to school that day. I had been leading up to it [plain dress] all summer. I knew I should do something. I went to public school, and I knew it was going to be a big change. I asked my parents, and then the next day we made the plain dress. It was like a celebration. Mother wrote a note the next day that [I] stayed home to sew, and it was okay. . . .

> Grandma came out, I remember she drove out, and I was excited, and she said, "Oh the angels in heaven are rejoicing today." That was just such a good feeling. I was home there because I had to try [the dress] on to make sure it fit. I don't know if I did so much sewing, but it was exciting. (J. Dietrich 1995)

This same woman also experienced the bonding of mother and daughter through the customs of dress when her own daughter took plain dress at the age of thirteen.

> Most of the girls her age started dressing plain when they were ten. She would have, at that time. We always felt that it's best that you're a little older and you know what you're doing, and halfway down the line . . . [she may] think, "Oh, I don't really want to do this." So she kind of held off, even though she was almost the only one that didn't [wear the dress] at that time. And then, finally, she said, "Oh, I want to." And we could tell that it was time. We thought she knew. Jacob questioned her and made sure she knew what she was doing. And, uh, so she was about thirteen. Almost fourteen. . . .
>
> I think it was special, traditional, passing it [the dress] down, sharing. . . . She got dresses from somebody else, used dresses. And some people gave her material as a gift. That was another thing, when I dressed plain I got so many pieces of material. That's what people would do, it was a custom. Katie did get gifts of material. It's what people do when a girl decides to go plain. (ibid.)

Plain dress for women simultaneously *separates* women from men while creating *cohesion* among women. Jane spoke of the affinity among women of all ages who celebrate the novice beginning to dress plain by offering to help sew the dresses.

> And another thing, somebody called up the next day and said, "Do you need help with sewing?" Sometimes they'll have a sewing, you know, when somebody dresses plain, all of a sudden and they need all these dresses. But since she had dresses, we didn't have a sewing. We just made dresses, like I said, a month later. Oh, I made her I don't know how many dresses last winter, new, when she started out, but if not, the ladies get together and sew 'til you have enough. Or

> even for a lady who doesn't sew, once in a while you'll have a lady who doesn't sew, especially someone who came in and wasn't plain, and who wasn't used to sewing. Then they'll have a sewing for so and so and make three or four dresses, even after they've been "on the way" awhile. And even after he (Jane's baby) was born, somebody just made me three new dresses recently, because they knew that it's hard for a mother to sew. (ibid.)

Sisters also speak of their aging mothers, who assist in sewing the coverings because they are themselves unable to perform the intricate stitches that the gathered portion requires. "My mother makes my coverings. Somebody makes them for most ladies. I don't know how many of them make them . . . it's very tedious, there's a lot of gathering. My mother makes a lot for the ones in Iowa. She's the 'covering lady.' My grandmother used to, but she's old and can't. There's different ones here in my group that do them for people" (ibid.).

In addition to women's vertical relationships with their own mothers and grandmothers, women refer frequently to their relationships with kinship or friendship groups. These lateral groups talk among themselves to reach consensus on dress issues. They deliberate over the appropriateness of varying the dress, how they feel about delicate issues of women's and men's behavior in the private sphere of home and bedroom, and propriety in public behavior. Frequent comments among sisters, such as "Of course the women do talk about it among themselves," and "I talk to my friends about it," indicate that women often reach out to one another for reassurance concerning dress and behavior norms in their plain society.

Sisters discuss the common feeling of discomfort that women have when they first don plain dress. River Brethren women do not like to "stand out." The women who take the dress admit to psychological discomfort at wearing it for the first time. Wearing the garb can even lead to physical discomfort: "I looked at somebody else's [covering], I thought, 'Oh, isn't her covering tight!' But when I first started wearing them, my ears were sore, because I wasn't used to the covering. But now I don't even notice it" (J. Dietrich 1995).

Beginning to dress plain at the age of twenty-five, far later than most women, another sister related her discomfiture when wearing the dress in public: "The first time I went shopping, I made sure I went when I only saw certain people" (M. Schubauer 1995). When I asked another sister if she

felt "strange" wearing the dress, she commented that it bothered her at first, but that "I'm aware that I'm different, but it doesn't bother me [now]. Very few locals ask me about my dress" (J. Dietrich 1995).

Dressing plain is voluntary. Members do not urge or pressure young girls to rush into taking plain attire. The experience can prove painful for young women who dress plain before they are ready. One sister warns against allowing girls to adopt plain garb prematurely: "You just can't go and tell someone to dress this way. I mean, you have to know for yourself. It's just for her to decide. You shouldn't force it on someone. If you force it on someone, then maybe later in life they won't want it. Sometimes it happens. You feel hurt if it happens" (M. Schubauer 1995).

Plain clothing invites curiosity, stares, and tactless questions—and sometimes harassment—from the host culture. For some River Brethren womenfolk, such intrusion by outsiders creates feelings of disgust blended with amusement. Perhaps more than birthright members, converts acutely feel their liminality in wearing plain dress in dominant society. One such sister writes about her reaction to the curious stares of the public at her plain dress. Of a sojourn in New York City, she states:

> Whenever I arrive in New York, it takes me a few moments to adjust to people gaping at me. Is my slip showing? Is my hair coming down? *What is everybody looking at?* Oh, yeah. New Yorkers think we look odd. For religious reasons, I wear a veil on my head, a long, pleated dress and no jewelry. My husband wears dark clothing, a black hat and a beard without a mustache. . . . Although I've been mistaken for a nun or a Quaker, at least they've got me in the right category. . . . If any New Yorkers come to Pennsylvania . . . we promise not to stare. (Brechbill 1995)

Some women feel this pressure less than others, though. Another young woman, a birthright sister, does not have this sense of doubt. She declares that she is free of the pressure of being marginal in society simply because she wears plain dress: "People put pressure on you . . . you have to keep up with the Joneses, you have to conform, to do this to be accepted. . . . I don't feel any of that pressure to come up to a certain standard in your dress. . . . I don't have to dress to give the right image, because God decides who I am in life. God measures us and if we come up to his standard it doesn't matter what other people say" (Witmer 1995).

Some of the women's ambivalence stems from problems of group identity and self-identity. One sister disclosed that her dress is mistaken for that of other religious groups, even by plain women from other Old Orders.

> A lot of the time we get asked if we're Catholic sisters. [Other plain folks] usually start talking Dutch to me. Some other plain person will come up if I'm down in the country shopping. I don't speak Dutch. Most [plain] people know who's who. If you go out of the area they don't know what you are. If we go out of state, people don't see many plain people. Someone will ask us if we are Amish. We tell them we're Old Order River Brethren. Our style is a little different. Of course a strange person wouldn't notice that. Mennonites don't have this "frill," and our capes are more pointy, theirs is a little squarer. (M. Schubauer 1995)

There is also the notion of being "exotic," like the Amish, in dressing plain. One member described the reaction of a "modern" to her plain garb.

> Before I was married, I was a nurse, and I was taking care of a patient, and first he asked if I was Amish, and it was like, "Ohhhhhh, are you taking care of me today?" . . .
>
> Very few locals ask me about my dress. If I would be asked, it would be somebody who hasn't seen it. When asked, "Are you Amish?" I say, "No, I'm Brethren, it's something like the Amish." Because almost everyone's heard of the Amish, a lot of people haven't heard of the Brethren, but I do tell them that's what I am, and that it is something like the Amish, and then sometimes they'll want to know more: "What's the difference? Do you have electricity?" (J. Dietrich 1995)

The relation of the River Brethren to the Amish is a source of tension. This may well be why River Brethren take pains to distinguish themselves from some of the Amish, whom some River Brethren perceive to have "the form but not the substance."

> A lot of people mistake us for Amish because they don't understand much at all about the plain groups. At first when I was really young I used to get really bothered because I know some Amish, and I

> know that not all Amish would really consider themselves really Christians, which is not known by some people. There are a few groups of Amish who do not necessarily preach or talk about having a born-again experience. They would be more what you would call "Traditionalists." They go by their tradition and they do read their Scriptures . . . but they don't practice or preach that the spirit may still lead you and guide you in your everyday walk of like. So for that reason it used to bother me, comparing me and my group to some of those people. (Witmer 1995)

A River Brethren freelance writer sends mixed messages about being modern and plain and about being compared to the Amish, whom she perceives as being backward and old-fashioned:

> I've lost track of the number of people who've asked me if I've seen the movie "Witness," and if it was authentic. . . . For the record: I have not seen "Witness." I *do* know that it was filmed in Lancaster County, so we assume the scenery is authentic. . . . We've been asked countless times if we're AY-mish from LAN-cas-ter. The correct pronunciation is AH-mish from LANK-as-ter, and we're neither, but that's close. We're Old Order River Brethren—a much smaller sect with similar beliefs—living near Chambersburg, 80 miles west of Lancaster.[9] (You've never heard of us because the tourist industry has no idea we exist, for which we are exceedingly grateful.) . . . Sometimes, the people who ask have just finished enthusing over what they think is my "Little House on the Prairie" lifestyle. I've never figured out how they make the leap from log cabin (which I don't live in) to movie theater (which I don't go to). (Brechbill 1995)

Being a River Brethren convert promotes additional feelings of liminality, particularly if the novice comes from outside society, rather than from another plain group. In her essay, Sister Bonnie expresses uncertainty about her identity as a member of an Old Order, portraying herself as plain, yet thoroughly modern. Sister Bonnie's ethnic clothing sets her apart from the outside world, despite her skill at making her way among city folk. This woman is proud of her membership in a small group and still more proud of her ability to interact effectively with worldly folk. She was reared in mass society; converted to River Brethren plainness as a young adult, she

nonetheless continued to associate with "the world" through the group's selective use of technology. Yet, set off from dominant culture by her appearance, she copes with ambivalence by clinging to the notion of herself as a plain woman who can handle modernity perfectly well.

The bonding between women and the development of women's unique dress symbols—such as hair language, head covering, and dress—helps counteract their ambivalence and set ethnic Old Order River Brethren apart from other members of society. These symbols create the "otherness" essential for the separation of this marginal group from the host society. Women's reference to their ethnic identity and choice of being outside the mainstream culture indicates an awareness of being "other" for the sake of nonconformity, their sense of a threatening dominant culture and the need to maintain boundaries through defensive structuring (Siegel 1970:11).

There are parallels between Jewish Hasidim and Old Order groups who wear plain costume as a witness that reinforces morality and is a "shield from temptation" (Yoder 1969:44). Folklorist Don Yoder has made the argument that as a result of orthodox appearance in dress, mass society expected to see orthodox behavior among Old Order members. I would extend Yoder's analysis to include a counter-relationship between the River Brethren woman and the host society. Aware of what she believes society expects of her, the River Brethren woman places limits on her own behavior. A young sister tells how plain clothes set her apart and regulate her behavior in relation to dominant society:

> [Plain dress] makes me feel different in that I know that every person that looks at me, expects something different from me than the average American. They expect more of me, I believe. Just by looking at me they would not expect to see me in a bar, they would not expect to see me in certain places. In a way, that's a security. Because I don't feel like you're as tempted. Because if you didn't have that on, and someone who doesn't know you that well might ask you to go with them somewhere, you might have to explain why you don't want to go there. And this way, they're just going to look at you, and they're not even going to want to ask you to go to these places or do certain things, because they can see just from looking at you that they know that this girl wouldn't do that. To me it frees you even more, frees me from certain temptations. You know, if I didn't have this on, it might be a lot easier for me to try it for one time. (Witmer 1995)

In response to out-group expectations, then, River Brethren womenfolk also place constraints upon their own behavior as a result of wearing the garb. One sister affirms her commitment to plain dress and connects outward appearance to maintaining orthodox behavior: "The desire to have our bodies decently covered is another reason for our style of dress; more important is the behavior that goes with it" (Brechbill 1993). The orthodox behavior justifies the wearing of the item of clothing. Conversely, the clothing justifies the group's behavioral restraints (in addition to those imposed by the larger society) upon its wearers. A Mennonite woman states that putting on plain dress is like "putting on the rules of the group" (Arthur 1995).

Like donning a uniform, putting on sectarian costume acts as a constraint on women's behavior. Simon Bronner has pointed out that clothing's symbolic and communicative value is heightened by its contact with our bodies. Thus, he argues, people remark on the change of behavior and attitude caused by the fit and feel of a uniform: the wearer takes on the role signified by the costume. The subjective power of clothing worn next to the skin "reinforces and verifies the benchmark" (Bronner 1982b:359). In the case of River Brethren folk, this benchmark is plain dress, which sets aside the group as a "peculiar people."

The nature of the special symbols of covering and hair, in fact, renders River Brethren women "peculiar" within their own group as a "gendered other." Anthropologist Clifford Geertz has noted that, as a symbol, clothing can be valued as a "thing disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning upon its experience" (Geertz 1973:45). In communities with little else in the way of conspicuous material symbolism, dress becomes a means to differentiate the community from the "outside" while also serving to symbolize power relations *within* the community (Klassen 1993).

Any perceived sexual aberration in outside society threatens the security of the group in its efforts to maintain its "purity," its psychic boundaries against the world. Through humor and joking, one brother demonstrated his discomfort with mass culture's blurring of gender identity and its attitude toward diverse sexualities. In discussing a candidate rejected for membership who happened to have a homosexual orientation, this narrator resolved his unease with this particular issue of gender identity by joking that it is a case of "Adam and Steve, rather than Adam and Eve" (Dietrich 1992c). Samuel Heilman, in his study of Jewish orthodoxy, has indicated that such "joking behavior" blocks out "literally and symbolically" the possibility of the speaker having to come to terms with topics that

threaten group security from modernity and its more liberal acceptance of aberrant behaviors (Heilman 1976:201).

Old Order River Brethren women and men share an abhorrence of departures from traditional, scripturally based masculine and feminine roles. They view any intrusion of mass culture's "lust of the flesh" into their sanctified way of life with anxiety. Just as there are male concerns about modesty in feminine dress, female concerns also abound. Recent fashion trends showing women "cross-dressing in religious garb" worry Old Order River Brethren women *and* men alike. This preoccupation with gender identity is illustrated by a newspaper article written by a sister who condemns the fashion world for creating men's clothes to be worn by women and for treating sectarian costume as "fashion" on the runway (Brechbill 1993). She laments that the fashion industry is marketing Old Order men's clothing on female models. Members of the Old Order River Brethren community express their revulsion.

> You don't mean to say *this* will go over as high fashion?
>
> There's nothing feminine about it. It's totally unnatural to want to look like a man.
>
> It makes you speechless. It's a shock. I never believed they'd have gone to this extent.
>
> They may be trying to imitate the clothes, but you can tell they don't have the simple lifestyle.
>
> That certainly is the form without the godliness.
>
> New York is mocking the godly people.

This article also considers a somewhat different offense: that New York's *haute couture* is a "mockery of people who have chosen to remain outside mainstream American culture" (ibid.). The writer goes on to discuss designers' interpretations of Hasidic dress and Catholic altar attire in popular fashion. "We [Old Order River Brethren] are offended at the symbols of religion—anyone's religion—being worn or otherwise used by someone who is not an adherent of the religion. The Amish, the Catholics and the

Hasidic Jews consider certain items representative of sacred concepts. For others to take those symbols and use them to make money is repugnant" (ibid.). This woman declares that designers have "perverted fashion by having women wear men's clothing." She announces that she speaks for the plain sects only: "We don't dress like this just to be 'different.' Our clothing is one of many symbols of our lives together as followers of Christ. It represents our unity as a church body . . . we as Christians also have chosen an identifiable garb" (ibid.).

For Old Order River Brethren, the modern world creates stress by invading boundaries of religious groups (such as the Old Orders) by marketing Amish, Catholic, and Hasidic garments, which are signs of piety for these religious groups. The revulsion of the Old Order River Brethren toward these fashions stems not only from a view of their "perversion" of sacred symbols, but also from the realization that the "powers that clothe" have become a threat, that dominant culture has invaded the closed and private world of "religious minorities" (ibid.). As Sister Rebecca describes it, "The fashion industry is based upon trying to get the other sex's attention, anything they can use to show up the body. . . . I don't think they realize what they're doing. They don't have the first idea of what the plain clothes stand for, so I don't think they have any idea what they're doing. It's just another way [for moderns] to dress differently" (Witmer 1995).

Blurring of sexual identity, particularly in sexual deviance, gender confusion, and cross-dressing, confounds the River Brethren and threatens not only abstract concepts of divine order but the social order as well. Sexual ambiguity and disorder imperils the group's structure: a breakdown of sexual roles also entails a breakdown of masculine order and authority.

In addition to hair language and plain dress as a hedge against mass culture, Old Order River Brethren members consider dress to be a powerful symbol of gender identity. For the Old Order River Brethren, "A masculine woman and a feminine man are monstrosities to be . . . abhorred" (Bendroth 1993:111). This viewpoint reflects the Old Order concern with harmony, with complementary sex roles and spheres (ibid., 113). Their concerns demonstrate what Karen McCarthy Brown has termed the "religion of the stressed and disoriented, of those for whom the world is overwhelming." Groups such as the Old Order River Brethren perceive anxieties and stresses from the modern world as the "fearsome, mute power of the flesh," and Brown asserts that because women bear the burden of human fleshliness, men will always seek to appropriate women to maintain social order (Brown 1994:175–77).

Old Orders' inclination for order means a prescribed place for women (Epp 1990:239). Women's roles in the River Brethren group are grounded in maintaining home and family values and in the spiritual nurturing of children. The centrality of traditional gender roles as part of the Old Order River Brethren construction of reality also eliminates, for River Brethren women, the choices and variations in gender identity that they observe in dominant society. Despite the common preoccupation among the Brethren with reality-threatening issues, such as dress as a badge of sexual identity, Old Order River Brethren women's and men's gender roles are sharply defined in plain dress, and for these folk, there is no blurring of those boundaries.

Young women who lengthen the hem, enlarge the covering brim, and increase the cape earn respect from older members for showing religious commitment. These women acquire a measure of status despite their youth, as opposed to grandmothers and "sages," who have to spend a lifetime earning their status. Young women's tendency toward greater orthodoxy in dress leads to deeper embeddedness in River Brethren society. Women's embeddedness leads, in turn, to sustained orthodoxy, and this orthodoxy bolsters separation and cultural survival. Women thus have the power, in dress, to improve the chances that the group will persist.

Sisters' discourse about hair and plain dress anchors women in community among themselves, forming a shared feminine culture. Grooming language acts as a focus around which women gather for mutual confirmation of their "place," for support and cohesion. River Brethren women create structures that support traditional women's roles as wives, mothers, and sisters, and that affords them a certain degree of power and autonomy. This bonding occurs among women who are members of kin and friendship networks within River Brethren society. The frequency of women's discussions concerning dress-related issues, such as the duties of the wife to her husband and her role in childbearing, strengthen the bonds between women and help form their sisterhood. Peer approval provides an additional affirmation of the "rightness" of each woman's place within the culture—an affirmation that comes through other women like her, not exclusively through men's religious discourse or social approval. Dress, as an arena of women's discourse, provides sisters with acceptable ways to monitor each other's orthodoxy in clothing and behavior.

Additionally, women's dress functions to maintain the boundaries between women and men, supporting a strict role division between the

sexes. Plain dress—as a means of separating women and men—visibly sustains the social and sexual divisions upon which River Brethren society is based. To be sure, the most symbolic items of plain dress (head coverings, such as hair and cap) follow scriptural passages and show the group's literal interpretation of the Bible. But dress differences function to define women's traditional roles in relation to men's—and thereby also define what is marginal to the group.

Because they are marginal in the context of dominant society, Old Order River Brethren are a group in tension. They perceive that they are threatened by the host culture and its array of choices and intrusions. The invasion of dominant society into River Brethren sectarian society comes from various sources. For River Brethren, the most threatening sources are the blurring of sex roles and boundaries as a result of "women's lib" and the "deviance," as they view it, of mass culture. A group in tension is sustained either by tightening its controls or redefining its norms (ibid.). Young River Brethren women recognize these tensions and respond by voluntarily tightening their internal controls in altering plain dress to achieve greater internal cohesion and external boundaries. In time, these changes may become the group norm in dress.

The Old Order River Brethren church accords women some latitude in dress choice as long as it does not lead to marginality in dress. Women alter their conformity in dress (following a previously established pattern) to an acceptable form of "deviance." In Linda Boynton Arthur's definition, deviance in dress is an "irregularity in the pattern previously established" (ibid.). Deviance can therefore have either negative or positive influences. Arthur, who takes the narrow definition of deviance, asserts that deviancy is "disvalued" in the group; however, my data show that deviance is only assessed negatively by River Brethren if it errs on the side of marginality. Old Order River Brethren value increased orthodoxy as a form of adaptation and change in sectarian dress customs, as a strategy to strengthen boundaries, and as a way to increase group cohesion for cultural survival.

In the sisters' dialogue about dress issues, they repeatedly affirm the biblical principle of "headship." From my perspective, sisters who accept the dress consent to cultural tradeoffs with their men to maintain traditions that support orthodoxy and maintenance of the culture. In their compliance, I would argue, women barter their autonomy for both cultural submission embedded in plain dress and also for the protection of men; their self-identity in exchange for freedom from making decisions or taking leadership

roles; their power to create their own social control—in changing and adapting core symbols of dress—for personal security and well-being. These tradeoffs result in a shared social control between women and men that maintains the cultural boundaries of the Old Order River Brethren.

Among the plain groups, River Brethren women are among the staunchest defenders and supporters of plain dress. Women themselves have the power, in dress, to uphold and preserve the ethnic culture. By willing acceptance of their subordinate role (embedded in women's clothing) and by the appropriation of their bodies and raiment to preserve the social contract between women and men, sisters sustain the reciprocity of traditional rights and obligations between women and men that preserve the cohesive community from the threat of mass culture. By wearing the unique signs of their differentiation from other Old Orders and from modern women—and from modern society as well—women and their traditions in dress enable the River Brethren to persist in separation and to survive.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Stephen Scott has pointed out that Old Order River Brethren are modern in technology, but "definitely do not consider ourselves in step with modern times when it comes to theology or morals" (Scott 1993a).

2. Old Order River Brethren prefer the King James translation of the Scriptures, because they consider this version to be more accurate than newer translations.

3. The few remaining members of the Horse and Buggy River Brethren are the exception here. They number fewer than twenty.

4. For examples of data on intimate relationships, see the comments of Sister Jane Dietrich in Chapter 4 (interview by author, York County, April 12, 1995).

5. The pants have a fastening similar to "sailor" pants, but the "plain" variety has fewer buttons. Once unbuttoned, the flap comes down over the crotch. Stephen Scott notes, "The plain people have tried to choose attire consistent with their emphasis on simplicity and modesty. . . . the broadfall closing on trousers [is] more modest than the fly front" (Scott 1986:23).

6. The "women's question" is a much broader issue for Mennonites. The phrase refers to the rising consciousness of Mennonite women concerning their subordinate status in male-female relationships. The covering has become the symbol for women's perception of their subordinate position and their lack of presence in the hierarchy of the Mennonite Church.

7. The "Nebraska" Amish of central Pennsylvania, who are the most conservative of all Pennsylvania Amish, also wear an opaque covering.

8. As suggested above, other plain groups refer to the covering as the "prayer veil," "cap," or "prayer covering."

9. This particular member dwells in Franklin County and is a member of the Strickler-Keller-Musser Group, or United Group.

◆ 3 ◆

From Commune to Commerce

Kitchen Traditions and Enterprise

During the 1980s, Old Order River Brethren women began extending their traditional roles as preparers and servers of food in the domestic sphere of their kitchens into a cottage industry. Sisters can cite Scripture to illustrate the biblical virtue of food as a bond for community: "Jesus saith unto them [the disciples], 'Come and dine'" (John 21:12 KJV). Those sisters who choose to provide dining opportunities outside their families and the River Brethren community engage in enterprises that are gender-appropriate: cottage baking, running roadside produce stands and farm-market stands, and cooking meals for tourists. In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania—which advertises its "Amish Farmlands" and "Dutch Country" to entice travelers—substantial opportunities have opened up for representatives of plain groups to be involved in the tourist industry, although they have also raised issues about the roles that are appropriate for pietistic men and women.

This chapter examines River Brethren women's kitchen traditions employed both inside the domestic sphere and, on occasion, outside that sphere, linking the two in commercial enterprise. I demonstrate what happens to River Brethren relations when this aspect of traditional intimacy

among family members around the communal table is transferred to nonmembers through women's commercialization of kitchen traditions. It is my aim to show that women's cookery and foodgiving traditions in kitchen enterprise afford women the power to affect group boundaries and community cohesion and to challenge the traditional River Brethren value of work for the communal good.

For comparative purposes, I interviewed twenty married women between the ages of eighteen and sixty-six, women with children still living in the home. This group of women did not engage in the commercialization of kitchen traditions. I asked them about their attitudes toward their roles as food providers, what foods they served, changes over time in food preparation and choices, and their view of themselves in these processes.

Using Stephen Scott's compilation of the occupations of Lancaster County members of the Strickler-Keller-Musser Group (Scott 1992), I ascertained the number of women engaged in commercial food enterprises.[1] Of ninety-three members of the group, forty-five are women, and forty-eight, men. (Women thus constitute 48.4 percent of the group, and men, 51.6 percent.) Of the forty-five women, eight—or 17 percent of the group of Old Order River Brethren women—engage in food enterprise. These eight women occupy themselves in kitchen enterprises to varying degrees and in dissimilar ways. Some run part-time roadside or farmers' market produce stands, which carry baked goods, jellies, flowers, fruits, and vegetables. A few participate extensively in traditional cooking and baking for outsiders, which is more independent of the agrarian tradition than produce stands and farm-market stands.

In addition, I looked at specific examples of three women, who—to varying degrees of involvement with outside society—are preparing food commercially. As a participant observer, I attended three commercial meals in Sister Deborah Miller's home, making notes on behavior and speech. I analyzed her attitudes toward her enterprise and toward outsiders through her tourist brochures, magazine and news articles, recorded interviews, and transcribed tape recordings of table conversations and interactions between the host family and outsiders/consumers. I obtained data from Sister Nora through observation of her behavior at a farmers' market and in transcribed, audiotaped descriptions of meals she prepared for tourists in her home setting. I interviewed nineteen-year-old Sister Eliza, under her mother's supervision, about her home-based baking enterprise, and transcribed her conversation from tape recordings.

Here, I describe River Brethren women's commonplace food traditions and discuss how these traditions strengthen group and family values and grant women power in the domestic sphere. I compare this traditional activity with the activities of women who engage in three types of women's commercial food enterprise (based on high, moderate, and low degrees of involvement with worldly folk). In addition, I focus on the concept of entrepreneurship—a concept that is evident in women's narratives, that brings into question the authenticity of the ethnic identity portrayed in the commercial meal, and that has the potential to alter the group.

A Customary River Brethren Family Meal

What is an "ordinary" meal in a River Brethren home? I was invited to share the hospitality of a Sunday night supper in the home of Brother Lloyd Dietrich, whom I happened to be interviewing. Aware that I would resume my weekly teaching schedule early the following morning, I hesitated when Lloyd's wife cordially invited me to stay and share supper around the kitchen table. Sister Lois insisted that it was no trouble, and began to set places for us around the large oblong table. She graciously extended the invitation on the spur of the moment; what I have recorded here is the result of sharing in an unplanned, informal family meal.

I sit on my side of the table facing my hostess and her son, David. To my left, Lloyd, the head of the family, presides over the table. Our evening meal, traditionally known by River Brethren as "supper," consists of lunch-meat cold cuts. The family had eaten a communal "dinner" at noon with the rest of the River Brethren congregation, who had gathered for morning worship and the communal meal afterward. This evening meal is a simple one, since the family's main meal had taken place at noon.

After Lloyd offers a brief blessing, we hand platters of bread and luncheon meats around the table. Along with tall glasses of iced tea, we consume an assortment of Pennsylvania sweet bologna, sliced roast beef, turkey ham (which is low in fat), and smoked turkey breast, along with sliced Swiss cheese and farmer's cheese. We construct sandwiches on thick slices of dark whole-grain bread. Other foods on the table consist of a pickled relish of corn and vegetables, a "Pennsylvania Dutch" relish called "chow

chow," cabbage slaw, and—for a low-fat dessert—fresh chilled peaches in vanilla yogurt. Condiments grouped on the center of the table include mustard, nonfat mayonnaise, salt, and pepper.

We converse quietly about Brother Dietrich's career as a history teacher in the Mennonite high school and about the early days of the couple's marriage. Mrs. Dietrich interrupts to remind her husband to use the nonfat mayonnaise and take his vitamin supplements. She explains that because her husband has problems with high cholesterol and heart disease, he has to watch his fat intake. Lois assumes the role of her husband's caretaker, prompting him to observe his low-fat diet. From the foods she serves, it is evident that she makes a point of providing low-fat foods for her family's health and well-being.

Her youngest son, now in his early twenties, needs no urging to eat—he devours his meal with few words. At the end of the supper, David's father invites him to recite the concluding grace. Dietrich explains to me that Old Order River Brethren always return grace at the end of the meal. We all then carry our own dishes to the sink. Mrs. Dietrich politely declines my offer to help wash up. We chat a bit more, and I thank my host and hostess and walk out into the early fall twilight.

Meals as Gifts of Love

Old Order River Brethren women's kitchen traditions include ethnic foodways, although that is only one component of their food preparation. I focus not so much on the artifact of food as on the cultural functions of food and how those functions bind the group together. The connections between ethnic foodways and the traditional River Brethren social order inform the kitchen culture of River Brethren women. Kitchen traditions consist of the women's attitudes toward their families and the religious connotations of providing food for their loved ones. "Food is love," River Brethren women often say, and for women like Lois Dietrich, providing healthful and nourishing meals allows them to give more than the sustenance of food—they also provide loving care and become the religious guardians of the domestic sphere.

This ethic of care emerges in patterns of food preparation among River Brethren women, who are acutely aware of their role in maintaining the health of their families. Women are frying less and forsaking breaded foods. Without exception, each of the twenty women I interviewed freeze and can large amounts of vegetables and fruits for their families' use. Aside from the economic advantages of doing so, these women repeatedly mention the freshness and vitamin content of fruits and vegetables for their family's health and eating pleasure, and they voice contentment and pride in providing these advantages for their families. The majority of women interviewed have tried to cut back on fats, sugars, salt, and calories in their cooking. Several women spoke about the advantages of organically grown garden produce and beef. They avoid additives by using foods they preserve themselves, rather than frozen goods and store-bought, packaged foods.

These women do not admit to preparing traditional "Pennsylvania Dutch" foods on a daily basis, as their mothers had. They have eliminated the pork-centered meals of their mothers' generation, meals rich with butter, cream, and lard. Everyday eating patterns no longer include the doughy, heavily fatted, "Pennsylvania Dutch" dishes. River Brethren women now introduce their families to a greater variety of recipes, preparing more "exotic" foods, such as homemade pizza, spaghetti, lasagna, Chinese cuisine, tacos and taco salads, more fish, and even foods from India. The greatest change in River Brethren eating patterns is the use of healthful, one-dish meals and casseroles in place of the full-course meat-potato-vegetable meals that their mothers used to set on the table. Few women rely on pork as much as their mothers and grandmothers had. Instead, they use more chicken, turkey, and lean beef.

A few women even carry health-food standards further by grinding their own flour and baking most of their bread. Some women use heirloom seeds to grow soybeans that they use in casseroles and other recipes; adding soy increases the nutritional content of these dishes. My evidence indicates that River Brethren women overall have changed their traditional "Pennsylvania Dutch" diet for the health and well-being of their families.

However, not all traditional dishes have been completely abandoned. These women tell me that they do indeed use their mothers' family recipes and the "Dutch" dishes—such as cabbage, pork, and sauerkraut for New Year's Day, or stuffed pig's stomach and pot pie—perhaps once a year. Dutch foodways and recipes linger on for special occasions, usually family

Fig. 6 River Brethren mother and daughter in their kitchen. Note the appliances in the background. Photograph by Lorin Reynolds.

festivities. Women still employ a limited mixture of the traditional foodways in their continued use of saffron, "puddings" (such as mush or scrapple), *panhaas* for breakfast, and dough foods, such as noodles, *knepp,* or dumplings. Habits of cooking also have been altered by the use of such conveniences as the crock pot, the microwave, and the dishwasher.

One document of the community's foodways is a collection of recipes from River Brethren members that was published in the late 1980s to benefit the River Brethren school. Suggesting the change from the Pennsylvania German cuisine of a past generation, Mrs. Amos Conley wrote in the preface that "Some of the recipes are treasured family keepsakes and some are new; however, they all reflect the love of good cooking." She emphasized the continuity in function across the generations, stating that "the kitchen is the center of our homes today just as it was for our grandmothers."

The "Appetizers" section is one indication of the new mix of River Brethren foods. Of the sixteen recipes listed, a whopping half are for the pickles and relish associated with Pennsylvania German foodways, but one can also find "vegetable pizza" and cheese balls (offered by young school

students). Under "Soups, Salads and Sauces," several Pennsylvania German dishes are identified as "old-fashioned" or belonging to "Grandma." An "Old-Fashioned Rivel Corn Soup" came from Martha Strickler, who died in 1986 at the age of 101. "Grandma's Spring Salad" compares the original recipe from Lydia Hawbaker (1880–1966) and the revised version by granddaughter Mary Lou Keller Myers.

Original:
nice thick cream
sugar to make it sweet
vinegar to make it sour
salt and pepper to taste
enough fresh garden lettuce to feed family

My Version:
½ c. evaporated milk
½ c. sugar
2 Tbsp. vinegar
salt and pepper to taste
enough fresh garden lettuce to feed family

Myers commented, "Grandma gave me the original recipe; however, I like to cook with regular measurements. (I haven't had 'nice thick cream' since Lawrence sold the dairy cows in 1957, so I substitute evaporated milk.)" As for her contribution, she stated, "I sometimes add fresh ruffled, Bibb and butter crunch lettuce. I sometimes add fresh spinach leaves and thinly sliced, new radishes and onions." With humor, she offered, "May not taste quite like Grandma's, but it does suit my families [*sic*] 'modern day' tastes!" In the same section, one can find "Cranberry Jello Salad," "Mexican Salad," and "Taco Salad." Among the Pennsylvania German standbys in the rest of the collection, one can locate "Schnitz and Knepp," "Sauerkraut and Ring Bologna," "Chicken Pot Pie," "Dandelion Dressing," "Ham and Bean Soup," "Fastnachts," and "Shoo-fly Pie." One whole section of the collection is devoted to "Cooking for a Crowd," including a "Sunday Dinner" (submitted by Carrie Shirk) to feed 180. It consists of 19–20 pounds of ground turkey, 7 pounds of noodles, and sixteen small cans (each) of cream of celery soup and cream of chicken soup. Along with onions, celery, milk, and butter, all the ingredients are mixed together for a communal dish.

Without exception, River Brethren women describe an emphasis on nurture as an ethic of care in their role in feeding the family. Consider, as a typical example, Sister Roberta, who works part-time in an office. She still finds room in her schedule to grow a sizeable garden for freezing and canning, and to rise at six o'clock on a summer morning to pick beans at her sister's "place." "This way," she says, "we get a chance to chat." Her husband manages the farm, but Roberta grows produce for her mother and father in addition to meeting her family's needs. She freezes and cans large quantities of lima beans, green beans, corn, peas, and carrots. In addition, she cans peaches, apricots, cherries, pears, and tomatoes. Roberta prefers to process her own fruits and vegetables, because "I feel so good about it." She claims that her methods of open kettle canning use less sugar and help preserve the vitamins so important to her family's nourishment.

Roberta stresses planning meals for her family for healthy eating. She strives to can and freeze at an optimal time, when the fruits and vegetables are at their height of perfection: "I feel more confident that they get frozen at the best time—they are better than 'bought.' They taste better and have more vitamins. There's a lot of satisfaction to it. If you put more effort to it, it's more satisfying. Of course I grew up with it. Economically, I enjoy that it stretches our budget—you put more on the table and get better for less."[2]

Roberta is proud of her cooking and her ability to provide nourishing foods. A notable recipe is "one of my specialties," homemade "V-5" juice, which she cans specially for her family. Similar to the commercial V-8 juice ("only better"), it contains five vegetables, and Roberta claims that her family likes it better. Her concern for her family's well-being also extends to modifying recipes for healthier eating: "I go easy on the salt. I don't worry about the fat, because I use olive oil instead." She serves little pork because "it doesn't freeze as well as beef, and it's not as healthy."

Like most River Brethren women, Sister Roberta is other-centered. Often, in conversation, Roberta precedes her description of certain dishes by stating, "my husband is very fond of . . . ," or "my husband just loves . . . ," indicating the pleasure she derives from cooking meals as gifts of love. Her statement, "I make whatever my husband wants," indicates the self-effacement of her view of foodgiving as joyful self-sacrifice.

Roberta attributes her love of cooking and her concern for healthful nourishment to her own mother: "My mother had the attitude that if you got proper rest and food, you would do better in life. I think I have an obligation

to be sure the family has proper nourishment. It helps you to think more stably, and general well-being helps with the Christian life."

Asked if God had a special purpose in mind for her as the caretaker of the family, Roberta answers, "We always eat meals together as a family. Providing food is a religious responsibility—it's hand-in-hand. We can only do the job as well as we understand it; God wants me to." Roberta muses about her special caretaker role in the family: "It's up to the woman to make the home a home. . . . It helps to stay involved with my husband and daughter. At mealtimes and when we do dishes afterwards, I check with [my daughter] to see how her homework turned out, and how her day at school was."

Sister Roberta views foodgiving as a "ministry." She endeavors to make each dish "perfect." She shares cooking tips and recipes with other women, and she takes great pride in the appearance and the taste of foods, even to the extent of "mixing the colors of vegetables" to increase the aesthetic appeal of her meals and table setting. Roberta speaks of the family meal as a time for fellowship and bonding: "Mealtime is sacred because we let nothing distract us, no newspapers, no telephone. I really think it's a special responsibility to keep the family together. My family can count on it; it's a good time for conversation and to show we care for each other. I really think it's a special responsibility to keep the family together."

The evidence in Roberta's testimony furnishes an example of how River Brethren women regard foodgiving as a religious duty. River Brethren women who cook for their families practice woman-centered religion in kitchen traditions of foodgiving. In her analysis of Middle Eastern Jewish women's everyday experience, Susan Sered has suggested an interweave of the sacred and profane, the holy embedded in the everyday world of women's kitchen space. For the women she studied, time spent in the kitchen was sacred, for it was time spent in the service of God and the family (Sered 1988:130). For River Brethren women, too, food marks identity—both individual and group—and defines group boundaries. The relationship between the group and its food is formed primarily in the ability of food to provide social cohesion for the group. This is evident in statements of the women who see mealtime as an opportunity to interact as a close family: "As a mother, God would want me to provide nourishment and interaction. . . . We really try to focus on being together to stay connected with each other" (Farver 1996).

River Brethren kitchen traditions of foodgiving serve as an informal women's religious role. Echoing the findings in Susan Sered's study on

food and holiness, Old Order River Brethren women view food as a gift of love and food preparation as a religious pursuit. The kitchen is a sacred world, which radiates love and concern for the family (Sered 1988). One River Brethren sister provides an example of this in solo testimony at the spring love feast communion in March 1994. She likens the communion experience to "sharing a recipe with my sister"—and by using this domestic image as a metaphor for feminine friendship and sharing, she also evokes the closeness of the River Brethren engendered by worship and the love feast communion ritual. Sisters develop their own religiosity through these female images and activities rooted in the domestic sphere. As Sered has noted, in cooking and food preparation, the sacred is embedded in the profane (and as the above anecdote illustrates, the profane is embedded in the sacred); this provides a "diffuse" religiosity for women as a "major mode of human religious experience" (ibid., 129). Kitchen duties—and their accompanying significance for River Brethren women, a means of conferring love on the family—expand the religious experience for women outside of the spiritual realm into the domestic sphere, making the mother the center of her own religious experience in the home.

River Brethren women's identity is based upon self-sacrifice, upon complete commitment to home and family. In accepting food from the mother, Old Order River Brethren families also "ingest" her mores, values, and worldview (Counihan 1988:56). She is responsible for the socialization of her children, who are highly valued in Old Order River Brethren culture, and with whom the mother forms strong emotional ties through feeding and emotional nurturing. As Sister Kathryn affirms, "I think I preserve the family. We have conversation around the table. I put forth an effort for the evening meal, for the family connection" (Farver 1996).

The well-being of their families dominates Old Order River Brethren women's behavior and is the primary concern of all women, single or married. Indeed, these women perceive their role as looking out for the well-being of the entire religious family of Old Order River Brethren. In addition to the daily nourishment of their families, these women also participate in potluck suppers. The women of the family hosting the fellowship meal (following the weekly Sunday meeting) supply food for the group. Occasionally, the hostess will ask that the other sisters bring cookies or cake. There is social significance in women preparing the communal meals to maintain the group's ethnicity. Foodways scholar Janet Theophano has argued that "church family . . . and food are constraints which deflect the

impact of larger society" (Theophano 1978:28). Thus, in feeding the River Brethren group, these women are nurturing social cohesion in the community, providing a defense against intrusions of the dominant society.

Asked what would happen if the group discontinued the festive meals after worship, Sister Roberta states that the community "family" would come apart: "The very same thing would happen to the community as to the [nuclear] family: food keeps the family together. [Communal fellowship meals] give people who don't have much family a place to have family; people get to know each other better. We [the women] all share a turn having the meals."

Rooted in River Brethren sisters' self-identity is a tendency to look after the welfare of well-loved individuals through nurturing. If the River Brethren woman perceives herself as neglectful in this area of her family life, she experiences a sense of guilt. One woman I interviewed apologized to me for not being a "typical cook." She runs a grocery store, so she is "busy" and "time makes a difference [in her ability to cook]." She states that she uses "shortcuts," implying that she might not measure up to the standard of cooking from "scratch" that is basic in River Brethren cookery (Farver 1995). Another respondent declines to list daily menus for the meal survey, due to the changes in her menus since her children left home. She is apprehensive that her meals will appear wanting in comparison with those of other River Brethren women, who cook more elaborately. She perceives her performance in the kitchen as substandard because she deviates from the unwritten, accepted ethic of proper care in the River Brethren women's role of nurturing the family (E. Snyder 1996).

Old Order River Brethren women believe that self-yielding, submission to the service of others in family and community relationships, is the single most important duty of a woman. Like the Italian women of the *domus* in Robert Orsi's study and the Italian women of Florence in Carolyn Counihan's work, the Old Order River Brethren women are also devoted to the service of others (Orsi 1985; Counihan 1988:55–56). As providers and nurturers, River Brethren sisters achieve affirmation in the community and influence over their husbands and children. Women become identified with the food they offer, thus gaining considerable influence and rendering the Old Order River Brethren home mother-centered (Counihan 1988:54).

To my question about her role, Sister Harriet responds in a literal way: "My role is to provide nurturing, mothering, and being a homemaker" (Spangler 1996). The most daily, repetitive, and prominent form this care

takes is in the use of food to create "family" through nurturing. Harriet continues, "Suppertime is a special family time, to be closer, to touch base. We sit down and say grace. It helps preserve the family" (ibid.). It is this lifelong responsibility for kin and their nurturing that makes feeding her family a sacred act, an act of giving that brings her closer to God.

In providing food for others, Old Order River Brethren women believe that they are imitating God (Sered 1988:132). River Brethren women frame their self-identity in the kitchen and forge ethnic identity through food preparation and its attendant cultural values and emotions. In the kitchen, the young sister forms her deepest attachments to tradition (ibid.). These women know that food traditions create links to group identity and transfer religious and family values. Food preparation—based upon knowledge shared and inherited from mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other female relations—forms bonds between generations of Old Order River Brethren women. The compiled River Brethren cookbook often cites special recipes passed down from female relatives of earlier generations. Foods prepared just as mother and grandmother prepared them add an additional social dimension, because they link the future to the sacred past in families and they provide continuity in group life. Food becomes a channel through which Old Order River Brethren women achieve the symbolic communication of intense emotional connection to close female relatives. For example, Sister Lois quotes her daughter as saying, "I'm sure glad to have you [for my mother]." This woman's daughter notes that her mother's table helps keep the family together, especially at holidays: "I like to be with family. We have family gatherings [at mother's], children, grandchildren, a way to keep contact. It's nice to get together, going to the grandparents. We share family things around the table, funny things, or things that happened to us as children" (Lois Dietrich 1996).

River Brethren women's manipulation of food in its dual role as symbolic language and as nourishment influences their husbands and children and gives them the power of being emotionally needed. Food is a source of power for River Brethren women: in the domestic sphere, it affords the women status in their role as provider in the home *and* status as giver of love through the provision of food. Meals as gifts of love communicate to family members that they are cherished and important. One woman seems acutely aware of this crucial role: "I have a *very* important role to make the family know how important it is that Mother cares, and takes an interest" (Hoffman 1996).

For Old Order River Brethren women, being the mother takes on sacred overtones. These women recognize cooking and food provision for their families in the domestic sphere and in the social/kinship sphere as a righteous act, one in keeping with their role in the religious order of headship and the social order of the River Brethren. In preparing food for family meals, women have the power to create holiness and community cohesion. In humble kitchen labor, women become the guardians and perpetuators of the Old Order River Brethren customs and traditions that legitimize their everyday activities (Sered 1988:136). Preparing food is suffused with self-sacrifice and validates sisters' roles as nurturers and sustainers of the physical and spiritual survival of the family and the group.

Kitchen Traditions and Enterprise: Eliza, Nora, and Deborah

Women who market their cookery transfer the traditional power women have in the kitchen to their commercial food activities. In Old Order River Brethren culture, women's roles in nurturing others and providing food are intimately bound up with their faith and social roles. Sisters provide an emotional link between food and family that is centered in the kitchen. Thus, sisters carry over these roles in social intercourse and commerce with outsiders, linking food and meals with righteousness and living the good life.

For comparison with River Brethren women who do not engage in kitchen enterprise, I offer an ethnographic description of the experiences of three River Brethren women who *do:* Deborah runs a home-based business supplying tourists "Amish-type" meals; Nora bakes goods and sells them at a weekly farmers' market, and she has occasionally cooked for tourist groups; Eliza bakes pies and pastries to sell in a small neighborhood grocerette run by Old Order River Brethren. For these women, a range of engagement with modernity is evident in their kitchen enterprises. These sisters exhibit, respectively, a high, intermediate, and low degree of contact with outsiders in their businesses. Deborah has full interaction with tourists and consumers as a hostess in the intimacy of her home. Nora is transitional. She wavers between periodic weekly contact with the consumers outside the home at market and occasional tourist meals in her home. Eliza

Image not available

Fig. 7 An unmarried River Brethren woman at a stand run by River Brethren women at the Lancaster County farmers' market. Photograph by Lorin Reynolds.

has virtually no contact with outsiders in her business, operating exclusively inside her home. Because she is most like the ordinary River Brethren woman in her degree of separation from "the world," I begin with Eliza. I will then move to the narratives of Nora and Deborah, each having proportionately greater degrees of involvement with tourists and the public in their kitchen enterprises.

In the process of examining the uses and misuses of women's kitchen traditions as sources of integration and disintegration, I also investigate the widely promoted tradition of Amish culture in kitchen enterprise that has led to even greater confusion about River Brethren presentation and identity. I then analyze how kitchen enterprise reinforces and blurs group boundaries. I will examine, through women's discourse, the degrees and kinds of power (both within and outside the community) that these women wield through the commercial use of women's kitchen traditions: sisters employ traditional foodways in kitchen enterprise to gain social and economic power that both subverts and supports River Brethren culture and society.

Sister Eliza (July 2, 1995)

I travel to the home of Sister Emily Schubauer (West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County). Her daughter, Eliza, has established a home industry, baking for a neighborhood grocery. Eliza graduated from the Sonlight River Brethren School one year ago, and now works in her home, baking food and tutoring children on the computer. She is nineteen and baptized, so I refer to her as "Sister" Eliza. I find that Eliza's home enterprise has emerged from the River Brethren kin/friendship/ethnic network between the mother and daughter and the Farver family, also River Brethren and owners of a small grocery. Sisters Emily and Eliza exhibit a lively interaction with each other, narrating how the enterprise started. Eliza interrupts her mother to explain to me the details of the business: "Originally Ezra Farver asked if we would do it, 'cause he wanted baked goods. He asked about a year before my [high school graduation]. It was my decision, pretty much."

Sister Emily interjects with a comment about the three-generation bond of women in the family who have worked in this traditional foodways enterprise: "I worked in a bakery a year before we were married, and I said, 'It's a lot of work, and if you have it yourself, it's a *lot* of work. My grandma helped me, mostly, and I helped her for awhile.' Now she's [Eliza] on her own."

Eliza relates the story of her debut in the baking enterprise: "We started somewhere in January. Now, I pretty well do it all. I roll out crusts one night and bake the pies next morning. I deliver them and they price them. I just give them [the Farvers] a bill for every batch of pies I take out."

Sister Eliza's business consists of several favored pies that she knows that she can sell each week. It does not pay her to expand her stock for greater variety, because these special pies do not always sell.

> There's only three or four kinds that will sell on a weekly basis. Usually, if you make all sorts of unusual kinds people won't buy, except if they happen to be in there on impulse and say, "Oh, this week there's a snitz pie," they'll buy it this week, but next week they wouldn't buy it. So we usually just make three or four kinds each week. We usually make lemon sponge, cherry, shoofly, and sometimes blueberry and we've made strawberry. Pumpkin we make in the fall. We make apple in the fall too.

Eliza explains that some pies sell well because modern consumers do not have time in their schedules to make them, or perhaps, she muses, they just do not like to make them. Emily adds: "Some unusual pies we make are lemon meringue. I don't know why that's one they order, lemon meringue, but that's what they order. I guess they can't get them or don't like to make them. It's the same with mincemeat pies." Eliza feels that her pies taste better than store-bought pies: "Shoofly pies are not the same if you buy them in the store. I just couldn't believe anybody would buy those pies. I don't like to buy any pies like [ones they sell in the supermarkets]."

The only occasion on which Eliza has any contact with her customers is when she accepts a special order.

> A special order is when someone comes in and says, "I'm having a dinner tomorrow night, and I want one cherry, and one lemon sponge, one strawberry," or whatever. They usually order through the store. They just tell them at the store that, "I want a pie." And then I've had some miscellaneous special orders, like for a batch of chicken pot pie crusts, or something like that, two dozen of them. I just rolled them out. She [the customer] wanted to bake chicken pot pie, but she didn't want to roll them out.

Sometimes Eliza receives special orders for holiday baked goods. Holidays exert pressure on her to increase her output. For example, Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays require special kinds of baked goods that women do not have time to prepare for themselves, so they make use of Eliza's skills in the kitchen: "We make five kinds of Christmas cookies: sand tarts, peanut butter cookies with a kiss on top. Chocolate chip cookies, and a few others. One time I stayed up all night for the Thanksgiving [pies]. Well, so many people had orders for pumpkin pies and apple and mincemeat pies—that was about thirty to forty pies for Thanksgiving."

("That's *all* we made?" Emily breaks in.)

"Yes. But if you have all the crusts rolled out, it doesn't take that long to bake them. There are two ovens in the kitchen, and we have one in the basement that we had used. The most pies we ever baked must have been fifty. It took us two days to bake them."

I ask the women to tell me some of the business aspects of their microenterprise. Eliza responds, "You just figure out how much your pie pan costs, how much your ingredients cost for an individual pie. I usually make,

oh, maybe a dozen two days a week, plus special orders, if I have them. They [the Farvers] pay me twice monthly, and I charge by the individual pie."

Eliza has a reciprocal relationship with her suppliers. In exchange for ingredients at wholesale prices, Eliza helps the Farvers by supplying them with baked goods, and the Farvers provide a place for her to market her wares. She markets pies for about three dollars to the Farvers, who price them for profit at around four dollars per pie. The Farvers benefit from marketing Eliza's goods, and Eliza is able to use the store's overripe produce: she recycles it in her quickbreads for additional profit. Thus, she makes her pies and other baked goods with ingredients purchased from the Farvers at cost. "We buy our ingredients at Farver's, most of them. We buy frozen cherries and blueberries, and then we make our own filling, from scratch. We don't use bought. Usually, they just give me whatever brown bananas they have. It takes a lot of bananas for banana bread. They [the Farvers] offer ingredients to us at a wholesale price, because we are doing a favor for them by baking for the store."

Emily directs her comments as much to her daughter as to me: "She could probably sell more if she made breads. . . . You do make banana breads, shortbreads." But Eliza protests:

> Oh my, I'd never get finished. It's more work than the pies. If it's a pie, you can just throw it together and stick it in the oven. If it's cookies, you have to make them individually. Raised bread you have to mix up, then let it raise for hours, then punch it down and form it into loaves, and then you have to make sure it's baked, and then you have to cool it properly so it doesn't dry out. [I make] quickbreads, but not cakes. I make banana, zucchini, and pumpkin breads. They're hardly ever [unsold].

The women discuss some of the problems connected to doing business with a small grocer: "Actually Ezra's store is not, uh, set up for quality pies . . . but the pies Eliza bakes are higher quality pies . . . because they [the Farvers] don't have higher priced items. Persons who come to buy there don't come for the higher priced pies. Basically it's a bulk food store, so people who come for bulk foods are not going to buy that many pies. We could send her pies to Root's, where you have hundreds of people walking by—" Before she can finish, Eliza adds: "But . . . there's hundreds of pies, too, where you have more competition. And Sister Nora sells pies there already. She was selling pies

before I started, so I wouldn't do that. . . . We don't want to set up another stand, because we'd be in competition with our own group."

I suggest that perhaps she could consider running a roadside stand, as many Mennonites and Amish do. The women have indeed explored this avenue of marketing, but they find that state, county, and township regulations hamper micro-enterprise for women. Eliza and Emily describe the complexities of these restrictions:

> Roadside is a problem because you have to keep [the pies] cold. Roadside you don't do quite as well. Actually we're not allowed to sell retail here. Roadside we don't have to have a license. We had to get a special permit [for the kitchen] because this is industrial zoned land, so it's not even residential, but the house was here before the plant [the nearby Bulova Watch plant]. So it's really confusing. You have to get a permit for a home bakery. If it was a residential zoning, we wouldn't have to get a permit for a bakery.

Eliza corrects her mother: "No, you have to get a license for your kitchen, but not a permit. The township said, 'You can't sell retail, is that a problem?' [It's] . . . because they don't want the traffic. . . . The kitchen license sends a state kitchen inspector once a year for about thirty dollars to inspect your water, but since we're on a town road, [we're] okay. But if you have a well, you must have it tested." Emily points out the further complications of running her home-based business: "If you bake less than a hundred pounds of flour, then you don't need a license. But we use about five hundred pounds of flour a year."

I ask Eliza why she would rather be working in the home than participating in the outside workaday world. She responds,

> First of all, then you can run your own schedule. If it's something like baking pies, and it doesn't suit you one morning, then you can do it in the evening. And there's a lot of pressures and influences that aren't on you if you can work in your own home. In other words if you're a cashier at K-mart, first of all, you're probably going to be the only person there dressed differently, and secondly, you're going to be surrounded by all these things, like, oh, clothing, and perfumes, and jewelry, and just all this stuff. Not that you would even *want* to have it, but just this whole consumer mind-set about, "Oh, I have to

> buy this now, and oh, I really need that, and I really like that, so I'm going to get it." You don't need it. And the influence of just listening to easy-listening music all day, then you start getting used to that kind of music. That's obviously not godly or edifying. It doesn't draw you close to Christ just listening to music like that all day. And if you're around people who are cursing or swearing who themselves don't have any standards, or morals . . . you get used to it and start accepting it. Not that you really want to, but it just kind of seeps in.

When I inquire about her allusion to dress in connection with working on the "outside," Eliza replies,

> I make all my own dresses, so the actual dress that I wear doesn't matter, and because I *know* that I'm different, I wouldn't really be tempted to change my dress. But I might think that I need three more pairs of shoes now. You know, because my co-workers wear a different pair of shoes every day, I don't want to be seen in the same old pair of shoes all week long. Well, you don't need three extra pairs of shoes to go to work. [*She laughs.*] Or, oh, just purses, and scarves, and sweaters, and coats, and accessories.

I ask what Emily had had in mind when she urged Eliza to get into the baking business. She answers, "It was something she could do without leaving the home. So she could help me. She also helped at [the River Brethren] school; she took care of tutoring for a learning disabled program at our school, a reading therapy program."

Eliza explains her enthusiasm in her recent plan to develop this computer home industry in addition to her baking.

> What it does is basically work with the neurological pathways in the brain to help the child learn how to learn. I'm starting the New Hope Learning Center and offering this program to the public, to students whose schools do not have a program to equip them, both public and private schools. I'm doing this out of my house, too. Probably, I'll give up the pie business if this does well, if it takes over full-time. It's a monthly charge, for four days a week. It's $275 a month. I can probably make from two students a month what I make with the pie business.

Eliza muses, more to herself than to me, "I enjoy what I do. . . . It's just that I'm not too dedicated to the baking business. It's nice, you know, but I'm not out to make it my life work, or anything, a full-time job."

Sister Emily watches and listens to her daughter discuss her new interest in computer home enterprise. She appears pleased with Eliza's success but disconcerted by her daughter's eagerness to shift from the traditional, intergenerational kitchen baking activity to a home-based but nontraditional computer tutoring service. For young women like Eliza, River Brethren kitchen traditions persist as a livelihood, but a question that arises is whether women who learn technological skills will be content to participate in foodways enterprises in the future.

Sister Nora (July 19, 1995)

Sister Nora Fahnestock welcomes me into her home (Rapho Township, Lancaster County), which is well west of the typical tourist area surrounding Intercourse, Blue Ball, Smoketown, Bird in Hand, and the Route 30 tourist strip, known in advertising language as the "heart of the Dutch country." Her story may be divided between her baking enterprise at Root's Country Market and Auction, a noted farmers' market and tourist haunt, and her occasional forays into cooking tourist dinners for a tour bus company. Nora's market enterprise and dinners are only part-time ventures that require limited, periodic contact with outsiders; this places her in an intermediate position between Deborah's business (which is full-time and which engages her in constant interaction with outsiders) and Eliza's (which is steady, but does not oblige her to have any contact with outsiders). I visit Nora because I am eager to explore the ways in which she falls into this intermediate range of contact with outsiders in her two kitchen enterprises.

We sit at Nora's table in the center of her spacious kitchen. The kitchen has a large black wood and coal stove that serves as a heat source in the winter. In the summer, Nora keeps a starched white runner on the top of the stove unit, with a vase of plastic roses for decoration. Near the living room entrance are a few easy chairs, a bookshelf, and a pair of working antique clocks, items that indicate that the kitchen serves as a casual living area as well as dining area for this family. The opposite end of the kitchen contains abundant cupboard storage and countertop work space, as well as a modern gas stove, refrigerator, and sink area with a microwave oven. There is no

kitchen clutter here, and every surface gleams. Nora's oak table seats about twenty. The windows have plain off-white shades with no curtains, and an overhead paddle fan keeps a breeze moving through the kitchen. It is calm and quiet in this room.

I begin by asking how Nora prepares her baked goods for market.

> I get up at 3:00 in the morning. We usually start Tuesday afternoon and roll the pie crusts. Then I mix up filling for the shoofly pie. Right now I'm taking fourteen shoofly pies and about eleven sponge, four to eight pumpkin rolls, and four pineapple upside-down cakes. I bake the shoofly pies on Mondays, because they're almost better if they set a day. And then I'm making my pineapple upside-down cakes on Monday. I used to get up and make everything early Tuesday morning, but then I was getting up at 12:30 A.M. and I thought, this is getting ridiculous.
>
> Now, I always get everything ready the night before market. I make the shoofly pies in the afternoon, and then I make the batter for the pineapple cakes, and I usually bake them the night before. Then I get all my lemon sponge pie filling all ready, except I measure out the milk but don't heat the milk till the morning, nor do I whip the egg whites until morning. Everything else is mixed up and covered up for the next morning. So I get up the next morning around 3:00 and heat the milk, turn on the ovens, and whip up the egg whites till they're stiff, and when all that's together, I mix stuff together, fill the pie plates, and fill the ovens. I have two ovens. I baked all these years with one oven. I got a new one, and put the old one out in the garage. I bake four pies at a time. When I have the lemon pies all made, then I get up and mix my pumpkin rolls and I make the cream cheese filling the night before and put it in the refrigerator. Starting October 1, I start with pumpkin pies and make mince pies a week or so before Thanksgiving through Christmas or maybe New Year's.

She describes how market officials regulate her business.

> I started out with pies, and since we didn't go in with a bake stand when we started there, they told me, "Don't get too big." I looked around the market and didn't see any pineapple cakes anywhere else, so I added them. I just have a small space, they don't want anybody to

> get too big. The market people limit or try not to get too many of one thing. Food stands are not as important as some things, like the candles. We would appreciate that there wouldn't be candle stands beside ours. They don't have a real regulation, but if we get too much of one thing, we cut each other's business. I don't make fruit pies, because I have to limit it, I have too much to do. If somebody orders a fruit pie, I'll make it. People do order vanilla crumb pies sometimes. It's similar to shoofly pies. It has a crumb topping and a vanilla flavoring. It's a good pie for summer. If you want one, you have to order it. I have a few people who want them. I won't make cookies. It takes a lot of time, that's why I don't make more. I have too much else to do to actually do this, but I keep thinking maybe one of my girls will want to get into it.

The entire family is involved in Nora's business. Her husband plays a role by supplying items for sale in addition to baked goods: "I sell more candles than baked things, because we have more. I sell plaques and clocks. [*She gestures toward the microwave, where there are several heart-shaped candles.*] My daughter made these candles today. We buy most of them . . . handmade. My husband used to make the clocks, but we buy a lot of them already made, because you have to have a dust-free, fly-free place to do it, and it isn't always possible on the farm." Nora points out that the men's enterprises keep them too busy to help her now at market. "In summertime David works at Abe's Buggy Rides and tourist rides so that's where he is today. He's been doing that for about thirteen years. We have a son who's eighteen and he's working on another farm, so David is trying to find more time to get home."

Nora's daughters help their mother with the baking tasks and the job of marketing their goods at Root's. Nora declares that her children are an asset in helping earn money for the family: "He [David] usually went to market when the girls were in school yet, but when the girls got out of school, they took over the market stand, and I go in the evenings." Nora explains the strategy that she and her husband use to keep the children home to help out. The parents arrange finances to reimburse the children for the work they do at home, so that they are not tempted to leave home to do "outwork":

> Until they were eighteen we didn't pay them [for their work]. . . . Instead we give them so much money when they're eighteen. That's

> the way we do it. I don't think every family does it alike. The reason we did that was that if some got the chance to work away to earn money and others wouldn't, then everybody would want to go away and work, because they wouldn't be making any money if they stayed at home. So that's why we did it that way. What they earned we kept until they're eighteen. When they were eighteen we gave them all the same amount of money, and from then on everything they earned was theirs. When they're eighteen, it's theirs, they may spend it as they like. We don't charge them any board.

As she talks, Nora reveals that several home enterprises other than the kitchen work help the family survive and pay their debts.[3] She indicates that her income from the baked goods and other jobs is essential, not "extra" or "spending" money, since farming is an uncertain business for the family.

> It's "extra" income, but we need it because you know how farming has been the last few years. It's been really tough. You get for wheat for a bushel what my dad got forty years ago, but it costs a lot more to raise it. We ran this chicken house for eighteen years, and we had this contract for the last twelve years, and we haven't got no raise one time, yet. Chicken business is really hit hard. We own the hen house, and they pay us so much for the chickens. 'Til we made the payments to the chicken house, and made repairs, we didn't hardly have anything to live on. Some years we made money on our corn, and some years you have a bad year and you don't make much. It varies. The steer business is so fluctuating. The last batch of steers we bought, before that, we made money. The last ones, we didn't get as much money as we paid for the steers, so all the corn was used for nothing. He (David) wouldn't be working at Abe's if he didn't feel we need the extra money. If we'd gotten into the chicken business ten years before, when we talked about it, we'd be ahead, but by the time we did, nothing moved and interest rates went up. . . . The extra income is pretty necessary.
>
> I wouldn't earn more at the baking than he does, but I have another enterprise that I do, reflexology. I would probably earn more at that than he does at Abe's, but I don't earn more at Root's than he does at Abe's. The baking isn't big enough to earn more than he. Rent

> [for the stand] is $147 a month. A few years back I wasn't sure we should keep this on [the market business]. Until we pay our rent, and count the profit we have, and then pay Lois [her older daughter, who helps at the market] . . . the rest of the things we earn go right back into the farm.

I ask Nora to describe the occasional dinners she provides for the tour groups guided by another River Brethren member. Nora tries to keep costs down. She freezes vegetables harvested from her own garden and buys meat on sale at market whenever possible. She shares her menus: "I make sausage, turkey, or chicken, mashed potatoes, baked corn, string beans, cole slaw or pepper cabbage. I also serve pickled beets, pies, usually a fruit pie, and shoofly, tapioca, and homemade bread." Nora uses set menus, for, as she puts it, "I don't have the same people each time. It doesn't matter if I repeat certain dishes. Most of my meals follow the same type of pattern, because I don't always have the same people. If I have a group of people from France this summer, I said they would have to give a donation, I wouldn't charge them. I wouldn't charge a regular fee. That way, if somebody came in here . . . if somebody wanted to make any trouble for me, I wasn't having a meal."

The River Brethren tour guide instructs Nora on how to manipulate her menu to present an "authentic Pennsylvania Dutch" meal. Nora quotes his advice: "He said pepper cabbage would be a more Pennsylvania Dutch meal." She describes her dinners:

> I made the mashed potatoes ahead like gourmet mashed potatoes, so they wouldn't be so stiff, with sour cream and a little onion and put them in crock pots, so that my kitchen wouldn't be quite as full when they came. I had forty some people, so I opened those doors there and stretched my table in there for twenty and my table in here for about twenty. The tour guide sat back there [in the easy chair in the kitchen]. My husband was here to help entertain the people. He enjoys that better than I do. He answers the questions and takes care of the blessing. He loves it and so do I, but it's just that we can't do everything. That's why we didn't do so many dinners, maybe eight.

The tour guide also gives some useful tips to Nora to help her earn extra money. Tourists have preferences for certain menu items. Sometimes, Nora manages to make additional income from her dinners by selling "extras"

from her dinners to the tourists: "The guide told me most people rave over tapioca, it's something that their parents might have made. He said they can buy ice cream anytime. I had a lot [left over] one time, and they just wanted to buy the tapioca, and homemade bread. He told them we have extras, so I sold quite a bit of bread and pies sometimes. Sometimes, I made extra if I had time, but I didn't always have time."

Nora ponders the problems of serving full-time in her kitchen and living room. Since her home is not designed for this business, Nora feels that she could do better if she could cook and serve in her basement. Her husband, familiar with tourist conventions from working at Abe's Buggy Rides, points out that the setting in kitchen enterprise is more important than Nora realizes. Nora balances his advice with her own evaluation of the setting for her dinners:

> Then I thought I would fix up my basement for it, he [her husband] said I could, but he said, most of the tourists really like eating in the kitchen. This is special to them. They can go anywhere and eat in a restaurant, but if it looks too much like a restaurant, it's not as special to them. But if I did do it regular, I would definitely do it like a kitchen in the basement. If they were eating in the kitchen [upstairs], it's a lot of work each time. Because I take the furniture out so I can get the table in. This is a lot of work.

To enhance the "kitchen" setting, she has purchased a ponderous, black enamel stove from an Amish home. The wood and coal stove provides a source of inexpensive heat for her home and for cooking certain foods for her meals: "Roasts and baked potatoes are very great in there, because they don't get too dark on the bottom. But baking, you have to have a certain temperature, and I wasn't raised on a wood stove like that, so I don't bake in there."

Nora describes some of the problems she has experienced in feeding so many people in an area of her house that is not specifically designed for the tourist trade. The lack of oven space, the lack of space to accommodate her guests in the kitchen, and the tourist preference for "Dutch" food makes extra work for Nora.

> Basically I had the same menu each time. He [the tour guide] said, "Have baked corn because it's another thing they like." That's another reason I had to have another oven, because I would have to roast the turkey and take the meat off the bones, and put it on the top shelf of

> the oven while the corn baked. It's just a lot of planning ahead, but now it would be twice as easy because I have two ovens.
>
> It's quite a lot of work doing dishes afterwards, I didn't have a dishwasher. That's another thing I would do, is get a dishwasher. I put Clorox in my water to wash my dishes to kill any germs. If you have a restaurant license you'd have to.

The format of Nora's dinners is relatively informal (and similar to Deborah's, I discover). The meal begins with a blessing offered by either the tour guide or Nora's husband. Nora does not deliver a rehearsed talk to her guests. Folks who come to dinner use the meal as a casual question-and-answer time, or just converse with the hostess. The tour guide, she explains, talks to the people on the bus about the different plain groups—Amish, Mennonite, and River Brethren—so that they will not have so many questions for the host family. The tour guide and Nora's husband also act as hosts by making the guests feel at home and answering questions while Nora cooks and sets the table. She finds it easier to have this type of help from the men so that she can concentrate on getting dinner without distractions, although Nora remarks that she has become used to talking while she works. Nora describes the pre-dinner format: "Mostly, people are nice to you. The tour guide always has a song before the meal, one of the River Brethren hymns to show them how we sing. And he does the grace. He explains that we usually return grace at the end of the meal: 'When you are eaten and full, forget not the Lord' (Deut. 8:10 KJV). He explains to them that that's why we return thanks after the meal. It's in the Old Testament. I think the Amish and a lot of plain groups do, too."

Nora does not claim to give an Amish dinner or portray Amish family life. She takes great pains to differentiate herself from the Amish to her guests, but finds their lack of comprehension frustrating. I inquire whether, in the context of making tourist meals, people confuse Nora with an Amish woman. She shows some exasperation in her answer:

> Yes, all the time. We always tell them we're not Amish. The tour guide is from our church and so he usually explains it very well, before we're eating and during. As far as the tourists are concerned, we're Amish. Everyone who dresses plain is Amish. The next person, you'll tell that you're not Amish, and then you'll explain it. You just can't seem to get that through their brain that there's different

> groups. People read about the Amish and they think everyone plain is Amish. Now there's people come from some areas that know better, but people who come from New York City and other areas, California—well they read about the Amish and everybody's Amish.

I ask if all the hard work of preparing the dinners is worth her while. Nora discusses how she calculates the prices of her meals: "I tried to figure how much it was per person, and it was worth my while. Before, the tour guide always paid me. The tour guide charged them a flat rate, and then usually they gave him a tip to give me, so I don't know what the tour company got. If they [the customers] wanted to donate to me for a meal, that's fine. I don't know what they would have donated, anywhere from eight to ten dollars a plate, maybe. If they donated, I might even have gotten more." For Nora, the tour guide is the middleman. She allows the tour guide to determine her share of the profit. The guide steers willing customers to her home, and Nora reciprocates by providing an authentic dining experience with a plain family for his tour groups.

Nora says that as a couple, she and her husband are exploring their options, considering how they could rearrange or begin new enterprises to allow her husband to be closer to home to manage the farm.

> We have discussed it already. He (David) would like to be home more, instead of down at Abe's to work, because when you have a farm, see, the fans break down in the chicken house or the water stops, the chicks won't live long without either. There he is down at Abe's and I'm here, and I don't always know what to do. So for that reason he'd really like to get some "side work" here in the home. We talked about quite a few different things to do. Most of the things we could think of would be *my* projects and he would be helping me out. I'd like to have something that he could do on his own. I don't always want to be telling my husband what to do. He is better than most men in the kitchen, he can cook, and he likes it. My boys all can, too. Or if we would decide, see we're getting older now, we would decide to do meals, we would probably be getting them together, and then maybe he would make certain things, and he would know how. I wouldn't have to tell him how all the time. We've considered bed and breakfast already, but not until we only have one child left. For two reasons: it interferes with family life too much. We have our devotions morning and evening, and people

> around all the time, time to go to bed, time to get up. And we don't have enough of rooms yet as long as our children are at home.

Nora has also analyzed the restrictions placed upon her enterprise by the county and township and by her "competition," who threatened to make her comply with the license requirement, even though the township is willing to waive it as long as she does not do dinners full-time.

> You have to go to the township and get a permit. Then you have to have a hearing for neighbors to complain. I wouldn't have any trouble with my neighbors. You are allowed to do it [part-time], they don't say anything. Legally, a lot of people are doing it, the township doesn't say anything, but if somebody has it in for you and reports it and gets you in trouble, then they could say you have to get a restaurant license. So for that reason, I don't do it anymore. Most of the time the tour guide talked to the county, and they said, "Go ahead, it's fine," but if anybody tried to bring me to court, he said, "Would you stand for me in court?" and he said, "No." So it's not maybe on the books, but they would look the other way. But if I ever wanted to get into it [full-time], I would just go to the township and get a permit and do it the right way. So I just decided I wouldn't do [dinners].
>
> Hey, most people would not give me trouble, but there's one person who had a problem. They had to get a restaurant license. He watches over the people here. I'm in the same township, so he would be after me to get a license, if he knew I was doing it, so that's why I'm not going to do it [full-time], unless I get a license. Probably we'd get by with it, but the tour guide knows this person . . . and he [would] try to get [me] in trouble. People gave him a hard time, and they were doing it [dinners], and they live in the same township as mine, so I decided just to forget it. We don't have a permit, and he'd probably make me do the same thing he does, and then it's not worth it, so I won't do it unless I go get a permit.

I address my next question, "Would you rather work outside the home?" to Louise, Nora's twenty-one-year-old daughter, who is cooking for a family birthday celebration while I talk to Nora. Sister Louise replies, "I don't mind cooking, but I don't like serving people I don't know." Nora interjects,

"When I was her age, I would've felt the very same way. She could change. She's a very good cook, but she doesn't like the other part." Sister Louise replies, "I'd rather work behind the scenes." Asked if she would like to work at a K-mart or a factory, she says that she would rather be home. Nora reflects on her daughter's wish to remain home to help out in kitchen enterprise. For Nora, it represents a choice of living in Rapho Township, removed from "tourist country," or moving to the Route 30 tourist strip to use the tourist industry as a way of keeping her girls working in the home instead of in the outside world.

> They help me at Root's [Market]. Our problem with having a shop with our kids at home is we're so far from the tourist area, I don't know if it would be a good idea. If we lived close, I would sell candles and baked things out of our house, and then I would keep the girls home doing that, but where we live—I like where we live better than the area down there [Intercourse, Bird in Hand, the Route 30 area]. But you have a much better chance of doing that [enterprise] there, than here.

Even though she has reservations about continuing her kitchen enterprise, Nora keeps the farmers' market business as a way to help her youngest daughter, Joanna, become established: "I have too much else to do to actually do this, but I keep thinking maybe one of my girls will want to get into it. But at this point, no, they decided not to. One's married, she's twenty-one, and Joanna's fifteen. Oh, I can go on yet a couple of years, if she's interested. If not, I'll just drop out of it—the baked things."

Nora has family matters on her mind. She is waiting to hear from her married daughter, who is expecting to deliver her third child today. I conclude our interview, for Nora's grown children and their families are coming for a birthday celebration in the evening, and she is preoccupied by the preparations for this family event.

Sister Deborah (May 27, 1995)

I visit the Jacob Miller family because they have identified themselves as Old Order River Brethren, and I wish to interview and investigate an Old Order River Brethren woman who has a full-time tourist meal enterprise. I

observe a strong, well-organized kitchen enterprise that involves family members in daily interaction with outsiders who are strangers to Old Order River Brethren culture.

This family, described in the leisure section of a nationally syndicated newspaper, *USA Today,* are River Brethren who, "like the Amish, live simply . . . [but who, unlike the Amish] . . . open up their home to visitors for dinner. Conversation is supplied by [Jacob], home cooking by [Deborah]" (Clurman 1989). For a "suggested fee" of $17.50 plus tax, Deborah welcomes me into her kitchen and seats me on a rocker by her grey-enameled kitchen wood stove. She encourages me to talk with her and her thirteen-year-old daughter, Rita, as well as Mary (six), and her youngest, Cal (four).[4] I enter into the heart of this home, the kitchen, and observe the intimacy of women working together in the kitchen to prepare the tourist meals and "feed" the family economy.

I ask to see her news clippings, and Deborah quickly obliges with a fistful of laminated articles clipped from several nationally syndicated newspapers.[5] She proudly points out that she has had visitors from every country in the world, and that she is nationally known by food and travel editors. While I skim over Deborah's newspaper articles, other diners begin to arrive—a woman from Virginia, accompanied by her mother from Georgia, and a couple from Wisconsin. Our hostess seats the tourists on a wash bench in front of the stove.

Deborah is an attractive, vibrant woman garbed in a plain grey cape dress and white prayer covering. Her children, Cal, Mary, and Rita, gather in the kitchen to chat with the visitors. Deborah's kitchen is modern, with two sink areas, plenty of countertop and cupboard space, a large refrigerator, and a gas stove. Though the house is wired for electricity, Deborah uses kerosene lamps and candlelight for her dinners. The dining room is illuminated softly by a five-light chandelier dimmed for the occasion and four lighted candles on the large oak table. Resting on the sideboard are several kerosene lamps. Deborah uses candles and oil lamps to light the dining experience because, she claims, they impart familial intimacy, an aura of faith shared around the communal table.

After becoming acquainted, we are ushered into the large dining room adjacent to the kitchen, where the fare is mashed potatoes sprinkled with parsley and a dollop of butter, fresh broccoli, green peppers stuffed with ground beef in a tomato sauce, a noodle pudding casserole, homemade bread, and tossed salad. Deborah recites the blessing, and the meal commences. She

serves a tureen brimming with a thick "holiday bean soup," flavored with chunks of ham hock, Deborah's home-canned tomatoes, and fifteen different kinds of beans. Traditional sweets and sours, spiced beets and pickled sauerkraut, complement the main dishes. The visitors top off their dinner with strawberry rhubarb crumb pie and sugar cookie squares. Deborah's beverages include coffee, tea, ice water, and iced tea.

Unlike Nora, who uses set menus, Deborah decides each morning what her day's menu will include. Asked if she rotates menus, she replies, "I have to vary them just for myself. I make whatever I'm hungry for, and I decide in the morning what I will cook." She interrupts herself to urge the diners to eat so that the food won't cool.

Deborah skillfully manages the conversation to orchestrate the meal. Meanwhile, the diners busy themselves in passing the dishes and serving themselves family style. In contrast to Nora, Deborah briskly volunteers information on the plain groups and answers visitors' questions while they consume their meals. Deborah views offering this information as part of her role as hostess, and it is a formulaic part of the dining experience. She believes that visitors want information on the plain people, especially the Amish. She supplies this information and attempts to create an "Amish" experience for tourists, who come from diverse backgrounds and regions of the United States and who, she thinks, have an intense curiosity to learn more about the Amish.

The diners have little knowledge (or stereotyped knowledge) of plain folk and their faith. In response to their questions, Deborah simplifies and dramatizes her narrative. I ask if the family is Mennonite, and Deborah replies:

> I'm Brethren. There are three parts to Plain People: Amish, Mennonites, and Brethren. The differences between Amish and Brethren and Mennonite are different kinds of transportation. The Amish drive grey buggies, the Old Order Mennonite drive black buggies, and the Brethren drive grey or black cars. There are about eighteen thousand Amish, thirty thousand Mennonites, and one thousand Brethren, so if you haven't heard of us, it's because we're a small group. There are about thirty-five kinds of Mennonites in this county. There are seven hundred churches in this county. Sunday morning it's our biggest traffic jam here; almost everyone goes to church.[6]

Old Order River Brethren pride themselves on being more conservative in some ways than other Old Orders. While we dine, Deborah relates the differences (as she views them) between Old Order River Brethren and Amish to her guests: "Our differences are in our dress and behavior. Amish believe in letting their young people sow their wild oats. We don't believe in that. We believe that if we let them 'out there' going wild and doing bad things and getting their wild oats in their system, that they might not be able to get them out of their system very easy. They'd be better off if they'd never had them in their system." I inquire, "So those are the two ways you are more conservative than the Amish, then?" Deborah replies, "Yes, in dress and with the young people. Amish let their young people date when they are sixteen, and ours are eighteen. When you're seventeen that's a big difference. One more year to wait."

At the conclusion of the meal, Deborah and her husband Jacob sing hymns around the table, a regular part of the tourist package for visitors. Sometimes Deborah plays hymns on her piano. (On one occasion, Deborah and her husband sang a hymn a cappella from the traditional hymnal of the Old Order River Brethren by the light of the kerosene lamp, her youngest son asleep in the arms of her husband. Several tourists photographed the memorable domestic scene.)

Deborah never turns people away, no matter how few. When I called for a reservation, I was the sole diner, yet she is willing to prepare a full-course meal for one. Up at seven o'clock in the morning, she bakes the bread as a traditional beginning for the "Amish" meal. She says that during a typical day, she tends her garden, later harvesting and canning its produce and preserving it for winter guests. She prepares pickles and jellies, an important part of "Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine." Her three grown children still live at home, as well as the teenager, Rita, who helps with the meal, and the two pre-school children. Deborah occupies herself with sewing all their clothing when she isn't preparing meals. She points out her busy family schedule: "[When I'm not cooking] I'm sewing all the time. I make all the clothes for the family. I have a lot of laundry, too."

Guests often observe that their childhoods were similar to the way things are today among the plain people. Many comments begin with "When I was a little girl, . . . my mother made me do . . . ," indicating the nostalgia that emerges in Deborah's candlelit, "family" setting. Tourist conversation centers on the one-room school experiences and the old-fashioned chores and family customs of their youth. As John Hostetler, a prominent sociologist of the Amish, has stated, "A place at the table is symbolic of belonging," and

these folks, influenced by the communal warmth and intimacy imparted through table narrative, voice this sense of connection (Hostetler 1993:162). As the dinner progresses, tourists begin to add their stories of childhood to Deborah's narrative, creating a kind of mutual bond among the guests. Deborah comments in her own way on the binding tendency of the communal table: "we feel when we go into somebody's house, you feel closer to them, you get more fellowship that way." The couple from Wisconsin is caught up in romantic images of the "good life" described in Deborah's narratives and embodied in the ambience fostered by the candlelit dinner setting. The woman from Wisconsin exclaims to the table audience, "I said to my husband, you know, if we got back to simple ways, the way all of you do [the Millers], it would be a much better world."

At dinner, Deborah entertains her guests with tales of how, before they built the new house, the family lived in the "old" way, without electricity or household conveniences. A visitor asks Deborah when she decided to start to do dinners.

> Quite a few years ago, about fifteen years ago. Well, we had no intention of starting a business, but a number of years ago we met a man over here in Ephrata that owns a bed and breakfast. He stayed for supper and . . . after he tasted my cooking, he said would you come and cook for my inn? And I said, no, I wouldn't work outside the home like that, but if you'd send your guests over here, I'd love to fix a big dinner for them. And he said, Oh, I don't think anybody'd want to do that. And I said well, I think they would. Why wouldn't they like to meet a local family instead of going to some tourist trap? See how we live. We were living in a house at the time without electricity. They could drink water without ice in it, see how I make a dinner without a refrigerator, meet the children, see how we get along as a family. So he went back to his inn and told the guests that were staying there that night, and I got started the next day.

In her narrative of how she started the business of opening her house to visitors, Deborah stresses the "country lifestyle."

> We are from Wisconsin and we moved here in 1984. We always say we built an "old" new house. I love the windows, they really give a lot of light . . . you use anything you can get hold of that you don't have to pay for, so that'd be the light. We had a house-raising for this. Usually

> houses aren't built that way, because most houses are more complicated than just a simple barn, but we wanted just a simple house. As you can see, it's just four rooms, plain roof, not a bunch of dormers, which takes more time and money to build. We had Mennonites build the basement, the Amish built the first and second floor, and the Brethren put on the roof and did all the sheet work. I did all the painting inside, and we moved in six weeks before Cal was born.

The presence of children at Deborah's table also enhances the sense of home, family, and custom: they participate freely in conversation with visitors. Deborah regards them as an economic advantage in her cottage industry. When her daughter Rita is asked about her future plans (since she has just completed her eighth-grade education at the neighboring Amish school), she replies, "I want to go to school, but I have to stay home and help my mother." Deborah quickly adds,

> She's going to do ninth grade by correspondence course. Then she doesn't have to go to . . . school, isn't that nice Rita? There are Mennonite schools, and Brethren goes up to twelfth grade, if she wants to do that. She finished eighth grade last Tuesday. She went to an Amish school, and there is nothing after that. If she were Amish, she would just learn domestic duties, and after a year or so, she would get a job cleaning houses. At ten dollars an hour, it would be worth doing that, who needs to go to high school or college?
>
> Or there are sewing factories here that girls could work in, or there are pretzel bakeries that would be connected with cooking. Girls wouldn't be able to work in them, but the boys, there are many, many crafts like woodworking, many gorgeous woodworking shops [*gesturing to her dining room furnishings*]. Now you can look around and see some of the handy stuff that was built around here. Or learn a trade from an uncle or an older brother or something, that's what boys could do.

Deborah goes to the kitchen to fetch dessert, and I ask Rita if she enjoys helping out at home. With the bluntness characteristic of children, she answers, "No, I'd rather go to school. I'm not allowed to go to high school because I have to stay home and help my mom. But I'm going to go to correspondence."

Over dessert and coffee, we continue to share bits of each other's lives, where we hail from, our families and jobs. Deborah, talkative over coffee, rhubarb pie, and the satisfied expressions of her table charges, reveals some of her feelings about allowing strangers into her private sphere: "I always feel shy in the beginning, but as soon as you start, and you get the name and find out about them, it's easier." [A guest interjects, "You are a warm and genuine hostess."] "And I've learned how to answer questions and stuff. People who aren't interested won't come here for dinner. So I'm getting interested people to begin with."

I ask Deborah whether she has had any experiences with guests who are unpleasant or uncomfortable. Her immediate response highlights the inevitable, sometimes powerful conflicts over faith, culture, and religious customs that can occur between the outsider and the host family: "Oh yeah, sure. See, we're conscientious objectors, so we're not eligible for the draft, and a lot of people think we're pacifists, or we're scared, or like that, so one guest said that they should line us all up and shoot us. Because we're yellow." She continued: "We had another guest. All evening he just asked us all kinds of questions. By the end of the evening, he said, 'I suppose you know what religion I am.' We said, 'No, I have no idea. You were asking all the questions.' He said, 'Well, I'm an atheist,' and you know, after he went home, I thought and thought about that. That man is not an atheist, he had too many questions. He hadn't made up his mind yet what he was, you know."

Deborah admits that the success of her business has led to tensions with her non-plain Lancaster Country neighbors, who do not like the intrusion of tourism into their backcountry, residential areas. Her neighbors exert pressure on her to reduce the numbers of visitors, so that the neighborhood will remain residential. They fear that their neighborhood may become transformed into another undesirable tourist strip like the ones in and around Intercourse, where roads are congested and tourists swell the local population. Deborah laments that before the "trouble," she was able to accommodate as many as forty to forty-five people for a meal.

> Last summer the township zoning board gave me a limitation of serving up to twenty people. I had served up to forty-five. In the living room I have another table that I could open up, but the neighbors thought we were getting too big, here, so they complained and put the kibosh on it.

> The reason I really got in trouble, is that my neighbor complained. He says, "I don't want to look out my window and see no tour bus. This ain't tour country, that's down in Intercourse." It was just hideous, listening to him rant and rave at the zoning hearing. Ugh. He really made a shame of himself. And his objection [was] overruled, and the zoning board put a limitation on me, and I can only use this room, and a maximum of twenty people. But they said I can do two dinners a day, one at 4:30 and one at 7:00. If there's a large group that wants to come, I have to say, I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to take you. Most of them don't want to split, a bus load is about forty-six. I did a lot of them, I mean, I've room. There's room to park them and turn them around and everything, all because he said he doesn't want to see a tour bus, he doesn't want to look out his window and see a tour bus. Well, he was antagonistic toward us from the very beginning. . . . A question that came up, I was talking to a Mennonite lady yesterday, I understand, maybe I'm wrong, that I can't even have the bus drive down here [to the foot of the property] and let them off and let them walk up here. He doesn't want to see a bus. So I just have to have real small groups. That takes more advertising, if you can get a big group, boy, you can make all your money in one shot.

As the evening wears on, visitors begin tucking twenty-dollar bills discreetly under the dinner plates. The lady from Wisconsin effuses: "I've always wanted to come and see this culture, and I am just . . . I just wish I could stay another week or so because there is so much to see and do, and I am fascinated by this. We hope to bring our four grandchildren, . . . and take them to all the things we have seen, and let them see how nice a world we have." The visitor's remark illustrates the romantic view outsiders have of plain people and their lifestyle. Deborah's sophisticated, skillful use of contrived ethnicity succeeds in perpetuating those fanciful images.

Uses and Misuses of Women's Kitchen Traditions

Deborah's power *outside* the group is grounded in the emotions tourists associate with women who traditionally provide food for their loved ones.

She is not merely selling a meal; through "Pennsylvania Dutch" foodways associated with Lancaster County, she also markets all the intensely subjective associations and emotions that accompany the communal eating experience. By cooking a good meal and by momentarily creating the good life in that communal experience, Deborah satisfies the tourists and contributes substantially to the family economy. Deborah self-consciously re-creates ethnicity through women's traditional kitchen enterprise. A dynamic between tourists and hostess exists in table talk that involves contact across a cultural barrier (van den Berghe and Keyes 1984:345). This cultural boundary translates Deborah's and Nora's enterprises into tourist attractions.

Deborah's dinner encounter, in which strangers share a "family" meal, crosses the cultural barrier between "worldly" folk and plain folk and allows communing, even if momentarily, among strangers. Sharing the table with "authentic" plain folk has become an event with spiritual overtones for visitors to Lancaster County. The eating experience carries with it connotations of a religious pilgrimage, a fictional journey into the nostalgic good life of the past, a temporary emotional bond through shared food and the fellowship that it fosters around the table. Deborah has the power, briefly, to produce this bond through the traditional Old Order River Brethren woman's role as foodgiver. Through the senses, through the aroma, taste, and sight of food, her meal evokes strong affective associations of childhood, family, mother love, and security, of being cherished and cared for. Deborah enhances this experience by developing a setting that brings forth and intensifies these emotions. The "props" she uses are the low light from candles and oil lamps, the thirteen-board oak table set with "country" patterned dishes, and the old-fashioned plank chairs and braided rugs.

Feasting, sharing of food, hospitality, and abundance are common images portraying traditional Lancaster County foodways. Deborah's advertising uses these conventions to link religion, family, food, and Lancaster County. They become important elements in successfully marketing women's kitchen traditions. Deborah employs traditional Lancaster County cuisine and its associated Amish folkways, drawing from popular culture and cinema images to attract tourists to her dinners for a taste of the good life. Her celebrated "formula" for the good life satisfies tourist demand for genuine "plain" dining.

Deborah's brochure sets the stage for the dining experience by beguiling the tourist with a romantic description of Amish country to create a mood of authenticity. The brochure reminds tourists, as further proof of

authenticity in the dining experience, that Deborah's house is not a restaurant, and that this is, indeed, "far more than a meal!" (Miller n.d.). Travel editors suggest such rural images as those conveyed in director Peter Weir's film, *Witness,* to describe the experience of dining with the Miller family. One editor rhapsodized about the Millers: "You may feel like Harrison Ford in the Amish-country movie *Witness*—enchanted, but out of your element. But by the end of the evening you'll have satisfied your appetite for both good food and information about these unusual people. [Jacob] will fill you in on worldly obligations—yes, the Amish do pay taxes—and [Deborah] will tell you of the delights of her first dishwasher. You may even hear a hymn or two" (Clurman 1989).

In presenting a contrived "Amish" meal, Deborah blurs her own ethnic identity as a River Brethren woman. She violates the sanctity of her home as a refuge from the "world" by enticing outsiders to dine at her table. She only secondarily reinforces the boundaries that keep her separated from her guests. In her narratives focused mainly on Amish culture, as opposed to Old Order River Brethren culture, Deborah promotes the Amish lifestyle to enhance her business.

One questions authenticity in Nora's experience, as well; she, like Deborah, presents a "staged" traditional "Pennsylvania Dutch" meal in her choice of foods, rather than an ordinary River Brethren meal. Nora, on the other hand, clearly takes pains to differentiate herself from the Amish to her customers. She uses her enterprise for economic gain, but her emphasis is on dinner presentations that draw stricter boundaries between her and her guests than Deborah's meals do. Nora refuses to engage in enterprise that disrupts the family's religious devotions or uproots children who still choose to live at home. She also exhibits a heroic devotion to the common good by declining competition with Deborah and Eliza in their kitchen enterprises.

Nora's role in preparing tourist meals is less sophisticated than Deborah's, and her dinners are straightforward tourist meals. She does not market her ethnicity. She accepts the tour guide's advice on how to create meals in an atmosphere that will please the guests. She works cooperatively with the River Brethren guide, who acts as middleman. His role is as a culture broker, someone who will interpret the plain lifestyle to tourists and act as a liaison between Nora's enterprise and his own. The tour guide orchestrates the tourists' experience, while Nora promotes women's traditions in native cuisine and functions as gatekeeper to the "far back regions"

of plain culture (Buck 1977:199). In the role of hostess, Nora concentrates on being the foodgiver. Conversely, Deborah assumes the role of interpreter of plain life and values. Thus, Deborah eliminates the middleman by combining the roles of culture broker and foodgiver.

Offering an "Amish" meal and an "Amish" experience in a household whose family identifies with the Old Order River Brethren, Deborah does not draw attention to the River Brethren but to the Amish as a promoted tradition. In some measure, Deborah herself plays the Amish role. I observed that her confusion of presentation and identity could baffle members of the tourist audience. Even though Deborah tells her guests that she is Old Order River Brethren, she incorrectly attributes some of the characteristics and beliefs of the Amish to the River Brethren.[7] For Deborah, ethnicity is a commodity to be bought and sold and is a kind of rhetoric used in dealing with outsiders. The ethnic distortion of claiming to be Old Order River Brethren while demonstrating Amish cookery and lifestyle invites a breakdown of social barriers between Deborah's family and "modern" customers.

Deborah admits to her guests that she is flattered by being mistaken for Amish. She identifies with the praise and respect of tourists for the Amish culture. Her enterprise defines Amish identity for the tourists but renders her own Old Order River Brethren identity even more ambiguous. In her table rhetoric, she demonstrates ambivalence about being like the Amish and unlike them at the same time. In the resulting confusion of identity, the consumer questions whether the dinner represents the traditions of the Amish or of the Old Order River Brethren.

Deborah's table talk betrays her sense of being "somewhere in between": "I've many times heard my husband say, 'We're not Catholic and we're not Protestant.' So it's like we're somewhere in between. And that's sort of like the Brethren; we're not Amish and we're not Mennonite, we're somewhere in between" (Miller 1995a).[8]

The profit motive in Deborah's enterprise, however, takes precedence over Old Order River Brethren traditional values of unity and submission to the group. It causes friction with other families involved in kitchen enterprise. In Deborah's commercialization of women's kitchen traditions, there is conflict over religious values, the will of the community versus self-will and self-promotion, and exploitation of the family and the Old Orders. These conflicts produce strains on the Old Order River Brethren community in response to the pressures of tourism (MacCannell 1984:377).

The dual nature of River Brethren kitchen enterprise is that for women like Eliza and Nora, marketing ethnic food fosters cohesion and acts as a buffer, maintaining the boundaries between the entrepreneur and the dominant culture. Nora firmly *preserves* the boundaries that separate her (and her family) from outsiders. Eliza avoids the tension that would inevitably result from direct interaction between the Old Order River Brethren woman who produces the product and the nonsectarian consumer. Her restricted role also reduces the conflict inherent in being an Old Order River Brethren woman *and* being a "vendor." Marc Olshan has observed that in Amish society, this role conflict "produces the earned performance for commercial success as well as cultural survival" (Olshan 1994b:140). While for the Amish this struggle results in a positive outcome, for Old Order River Brethren, the clash of values causes division among the group.

Eliza's mother, Emily, reinforces barriers between the young female entrepreneur and her worldly customers. Eliza produces the commodity, but she does not become involved in commercial interactions that might endanger her orthodoxy. Of the three entrepreneurs, she draws the strictest boundaries, remaining exclusively in the home for her baking enterprise. There is virtually no interaction between Eliza and the "worldly" customer.

Deborah, in particular, misrepresents River Brethren identity in portraying her meals as Amish and commercializing Amish foodways. By crossing boundaries in frequent interaction with outsiders, Deborah exposes her family and her community to worldly influence. Her children break bread with strangers to their faith on a daily basis. The world enters her kitchen, and for the price of a Pennsylvania Dutch dinner, she relinquishes control over her domain. This tourist invasion of the private sphere denies Deborah, as a River Brethren woman, the *choice* of remaining separated. Interaction between the River Brethren woman and the tourist in foodways enterprise grants legitimacy to both participants, placing them in a "state of talk." This discourse situates them on an open and equal basis as provider and consumer, further eroding boundaries between them (Goffman 1967:34).

Deborah uses traditions of Pennsylvania Dutch "Amish" cookery and foodgiving in ways that compromise River Brethren ethnic identity, anger the community, and imperil their religious values. Deborah's situation raises the moral issue of the marketing of the River Brethren as a "popular"

group that appeals to tourists. Indeed, a River Brethren member assured me that it is not the capitalistic impulse that the River Brethren object to, but Deborah's misrepresentation of Old Order River Brethren ethnic identity as Amish (Lloyd Dietrich 1995a).[9]

The Millers had been suspect even without the kitchen enterprise controversy. Originally from Wisconsin, of non-plain background, they came to the Old Order River Brethren in 1987 after having been rejected by another plain group in the county. They were initially accepted as church members on probationary status, because some members viewed them as "proud" and "insubordinate." After five years of problems with the family, including what one member referred to as "flagrant, chronic dishonesty," the father of the family was excommunicated.

Commercial kitchen traditions are rooted in the same values of cohesion and nurture as the kitchen traditions of the domestic sphere. From the evidence collected in my interviews, it is apparent that women who do not participate in kitchen enterprise are the norm. The "typical" River Brethren woman spends a great deal of time and effort planting, raising, and harvesting a garden for canning and freezing. Frugality and health concerns play their part in this behavior, but beyond these motivations, most women allude to the nutritional value of homegrown foods for their families, and they share a sense of satisfaction from their family's pleasure in eating the foods that they have preserved. The ordinary River Brethren woman believes that her meals are gifts of love. Extending the social functions of kitchen tasks, as Pamela Klassen has noted, "is an affirmation by women of the work they do to maintain the spiritual . . . survival of their community" (Klassen 1994:244). The daily meals women cook for their families, the weekly after-meeting communal fellowship meals and visiting, and the sharing of food in the home and among the church family at special liturgical times physically express the women's ability to integrate and give cohesion to the River Brethren community through the power of kitchen traditions.

Food places crucial kinds of influence in the hands of the River Brethren women who prepare meals and serve them to their families. The most important of these influences is the power of women to become the guardians and perpetuators of Old Order River Brethren traditions. Sisters are empowered through kitchen traditions to maintain gender identity, ethnic boundaries, and cohesion in the River Brethren home—and thus in

the community. As foodgivers, women minister to the physical body and the spiritual welfare of the community. And as mothers socializing their children (who identify with the mores and the worldview of their mothers), River Brethren women have the power to fashion mother-centered homes and to render their husbands and children subordinate to them in this role. In keeping the family home-centered around her supper table, the River Brethren woman maintains the stability of the family. And in bonding the family in the domestic sphere, she also supports community cohesion in her daily ritual of foodgiving. Women tend to see their role as God-given, one necessary for the health, well-being, and unity of their families. They refer to kitchen tasks as a ministry, a religious "duty."

Unlike domestic kitchen traditions, women's commercial kitchen traditions have the potential to rive the community. The kinds of activity Old Order River Brethren women are *likely* to do or *choose* to do are rooted in the domestic sphere. This is why entrepreneurial activities remain attractive to a small percentage of Old Order River Brethren women. For those few who choose to participate in kitchen enterprise, it is a source of economic and social power that can question the changing relationships of the River Brethren to the world. In the River Brethren view, the idea of "separation from the world" does not have to mean strict "seclusion." Stephen Scott has explained the evolving River Brethren attitude toward enterprise: "Working at home with one's family is just preferred to working away from home for both men and women. Since it is no longer possible for everyone to live on a farm this ideal is now seldom realized. The great majority of River Brethren relate to those outside the faith on a daily basis with little thought about being contaminated by their influence. It is believed that a Christian should be a light to the world and that you can be in the world but not of the world" (Scott 1999).

Nonetheless, my evidence indicates that entrepreneurship places women in a difficult, ambiguous position, particularly for those who have full involvement with the tourist consumer. In her dual view of the world as both socially threatening and economically beneficial to her culture, Deborah, in particular, generates conflicts within herself as well as conflicts between her and her sisters in the faith, among members of the community, and between the ethnic group and outside society.

In their extreme misuse, kitchen traditions in enterprise create internal divisions that may be more destructive of cohesion than the interaction with outsiders. While there is tolerance for the business ventures, the community

takes notice of members who blur the boundaries in commercial activity rooted in self-aggrandizement. Personality clashes, disagreements over territoriality, and competition between women for business produce rancor between families and "insubordination" to the collective will. River Brethren entrepreneurs who exceed the limits of tolerance for disobedience and dishonesty within the community find the reins of social disapproval pulled tight.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. The Strickler-Keller-Musser group merged officially on March 9, 1969. It was divided into the Lancaster and Franklin districts (Scott 1978:20).

2. Margaret Reynolds's notes show that "Roberta" was interviewed in 1996, and the information provided suggests that she is located in West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.–*Ed.*

3. For example, the family incurs new debts each time they expand farm outbuildings or buy new farming equipment. Nora mentioned the expense of building the chicken house and installing fans and watering devices.

4. Deborah has three older children who were not present on this occasion: Julia, Adam, and Samantha.

5. As a sampling of the extensive press coverage Deborah has received, see Clurman 1989, "Disciplines Define" 1992, Grossman 1992, Kalie 1994, Nathan 1993, Okun 1994, and Tait 1994.

6. Deborah's statements may not be entirely accurate concerning the numbers of or differences among these groups. They reflect the opinions of the respondent only, not those of the author.

7. For example, an unofficial River Brethren spokesman mentioned that Deborah claimed, incorrectly, that the River Brethren, like the Amish, may not have radios. However, this is an individual choice for River Brethren.

8. From a scholarly point of view, the Anabaptist groups are definitely considered Protestant. However, the Anabaptists do consider themselves a third religious option in Christianity because of their concept of Christianity as discipleship—as engaging in a new life—and because of their separatist, nonresistant, nonconforming stance toward "the world" (Bender 1944:20, 26, 31).

9. For a definition of reconstructed ethnicity, see MacCannell 1984:377, 385.

◆ 4 ◆

Women's Devotion and the Breadmaking Ritual

Breadmaking is a high point in the preparatory service for the most sacred of rituals, Old Order River Brethren love feast communion. Women mix, knead, and bake bread within the framework of this custom. Members of the River Brethren do not recall the origin of the ritual, and the few documentary sources on the River Brethren do not shed light on its history. Stephen Scott has speculated that "it may have originated in the Keller Group of the Old Order River Brethren" (Scott 1999). In fact, the Horse and Buggy Old Order River Brethren do not have this ritual. It is mentioned in Laban Brechbill's description of a love feast in 1909 at the home of Samuel Strickler:

> the deacons [*sic*] wife and the bishops [*sic*] wife work in unison in giving each sister a small amount until the whole is distributed among them, then each kneads her allotment for about one minute and then exchanges with another, and kneads that for about the same time. While the sisters are doing this kneading all the brethren present watch the ordeal and at the same time the Bishop explains

> concerning the ingredients in relation to the spiritual work of the individual. By this time kneading has discontinued and all the small lumps are put into one lump. They then take some and put it on a baking tin and roll it to a certain thickness and size, mark it in strips a little over an inch wide, and put it in the oven to bake; after baked it is ready for the communion table. (Brechbill 1972:106–7)

My view is that the breadmaking ritual became important to most River Brethren groups in order to reinforce traditional values at a time of increasing outside threats. Sisters who perform breadmaking learn far more than the patterned movements involved: performing a ritual "kitchen task," the women publicly act as bearers of tradition for their sect. River Brethren women, I will argue, forge a link between breadmaking and the preservation of the social order.

Breadmaking: Kitchen Task, Woman's Devotion

For the River Brethren, three services celebrate their highest of holy days, love feast communion: a morning preparatory service that includes breadmaking; an afternoon preaching and experience meeting, which emphasizes the sufferings of Christ; and the culminating Saturday evening love feast and footwashing service, in which all baptized members who are "right with God and their neighbors" partake in rituals of humility and obedience through the ceremonies of footwashing and of breaking bread in holy communion.

A sister's first participation in the love feast and breadmaking marks her entrance into the body of believers and illustrates her adult status as a member of the baptized community. Breadmaking denotes a transitional period for young women leaving late adolescence and entering adulthood in the River Brethren, for only after baptism into the group can a sister assume her ritual role in breadmaking. From an analytical viewpoint, breadmaking has particular significance as a rite of passage for women. After her first performance in this ritual, breadmaking becomes a rite of aging, an ongoing confirmation of female adult status in the community.

Breadmaking is exclusively a woman's devotion. Baptized women regard their participation as a sacred duty and their performance as a highlight of their religious experience. Martha views the breadmaking preparation and self-examination for love feast as a search for worthiness: "I don't want to have an impure part. Not that that's going to go into the bread. But, I mean if I'm going to handle the bread which is going to become communion bread, I want to make sure my heart is pure" (M. Schubauer 1993). Considering the bread a sacred substance, she feels that it was important to strive for inner purity so that she is worthy to handle the bread.

Another Old Order River Brethren woman refers to the humble nature of breadmaking as a "kitchen task." For her, it is a binding ritual, a performance expressing cohesion in the community. But it is also much more. Breadmaking is truly singular: the silent ceremony allows women to occupy a central ritual role in this traditional community. The breadmaking ritual is also unique to the Old Order River Brethren among all other Old Order sectarian and Anabaptist Brethren groups. While the Amish, Old Order Mennonites, Brethren groups, and other plain sectarians practice love feast and footwashing, only the Old Order River Brethren prepare their communion bread as part of a formal religious ritual.[1]

Breadmaking demonstrates another significant difference between the Old Order River Brethren and other Old Order societies, notably the Amish: the position of women in the groups. While the two most significant rites of passage in Amish society are adult baptism and marriage, breadmaking functions as a third rite solely for Old Order River Brethren women (Kraybill and Olshan 1994a:1–3). It is my argument that Old Order River Brethren, more than the Amish, confer greater status and respect on women in their society, since this rite accords both unmarried and married River Brethren women the religious power to integrate and renew their society.

The Amish grant greater status to married women over those who remain single. While it is true that unmarried Amish women contribute their economic share to the welfare of the group, the Amish customarily treat single women as symbolic children, social "non-persons" (Heilman 1976:42). They refer to women who do not marry as *altmachen,* or "old girls" (Olshan and Schmidt 1994:226). In Old Order groups, and particularly among the Amish, women are expected to marry and produce children. Amish women who remain single are unfulfilled culturally, since they do not meet community expectations through the prescribed roles of wife and mother.

Image not available

Fig. 8 Utensils for breadmaking: pans, rolling pins, sticks, and forks. Photograph by Lorin Reynolds.

Among Old Order River Brethren, baptized women, single or married, achieve equal adult status in breadmaking.[2] Their worth as individuals does not depend upon their marital status, but on their capacity to participate equally in the religious life of the River Brethren through baptism.

Love Feast Weekend: The Ritual Setting and Performance

Old Order River Brethren refer in native terms to breadmaking, part of their climactic, biannual Lancaster County love feast, as "preparation." A typical Sunday morning experience meeting, as it is called, consists of singing, Scripture, prayer, and about an hour of men's and women's solo testimony, followed by about an hour of preaching on scriptural texts by five or six of the elders and ministers.[3] Breadmaking, however, is structured into two main parts: the breadmaking ritual, framed by men's preaching and exhortation, which lasts about an hour, before a brief testimony period for women and men; then, about an hour more of men's sermon discourse centered on headship, the prayer covering, and obedience.[4]

Breadmaking has two distinct settings. Biannual Lancaster County love feast weekends alternate between the fall setting, in the barns of Old Order River Brethren members, and the spring setting, at the Sonlight River Brethren School in West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County. The group's Pennsylvania German agricultural traditions persist in the timing of the ritual.[5] Agricultural, calendrical, and ecclesiastical cycles converge, as the ritual is typically scheduled before the spring planting and the fall harvest. A preacher at a spring love feast celebration noted this seasonal and agricultural orientation in his sermon comment that "the bread is made in winter, but consumed in spring."

The Sonlight River Brethren School routinely serves as an educational setting for children of the River Brethren. This modest, modern school building has replaced the barn as a worship center in the winter months as well as for the spring love feast communion. The potential of subjective space to be either sacred or profane depends on its routine or ritual usage. That is, school space is used routinely for educational purposes, and it is then converted by

ritual usage into sacred space. The subjective space of both school and barn settings is transformed into ritual space for each breadmaking.[6]

In September 1994, I attended love feast at Andrew Hess's barn in West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County. The deacon's wife courteously directed me to a chair near the rear of the threshing floor, close to the women's section, where breadmaking tables were set up. She suggested that I could better observe the women and the ritual here. In other meetings that I attended I was also seated in the center threshing area, just behind the younger, unbaptized women.

Prior to the breadmaking ceremony, men arrange their chairs in long rows facing the women's section. In this men's area, the River Brethren assemble long, single-board trestle tables with wooden folding chairs along the walls facing these tables in preparation for the evening footwashing and communion. Women sit along the open frame walls of the opposite

Image not available

Fig. 9 The threshing floor setup for fall breadmaking.

hay mow, facing their tables, which serve as a work area for the making of the communion bread. Plastic tarps are hung on the open-frame wall behind the women to conceal an area in which women nurse and change their babies, for women's modesty is a special virtue.

River Brethren add additional trestle tables between the rows of chairs in the men's and women's sections to be used later for the footwashing and communion rituals. They reserve the forebay area of the barn for the men of authority in the brotherhood. These men sit at a table with a lectern that serves as a pulpit. As in all Old Order services, there is no raised platform or pulpit for these speakers, which indicates an egalitarian status among preachers and men and women in the collective.

The rectilinear arrangement of elders facing the congregation—at least to my eyes—connoted order and control in Old Order River Brethren culture. Both fall and spring settings make use of linear rows and rectilinear seating configurations. These rectangular groupings contrast sharply with the circular/elliptical configuration that women form as they gather around the tables to knead the bread. The closed ellipse of these performers symbolizes cohesion, and the configuration among women working the bread reinforces the image of unity under obedience to the group.

Men and women are physically separated for the ritual. In barn meetings, men's and boys' seats in the hay mow face toward the forebay. Baptized women who take part in making the bread occupy the opposite hay mow, a mirror image of the men's section. This seating arrangement reflects a hierarchy based upon religious status. The center section in the threshing area of the barn is particularly noteworthy, for it is an area given over to the nonbaptized: outsiders, visitors, adolescent girls, small children, and infants. Young women's inclusion in this section indicates the absence of a ritual role for them, a liminal state between adolescence and adulthood, between membership in the spiritual community and nonmembership.[7]

Occupants of the center threshing bay are not legitimate role-players in the breadmaking ritual (Heilman 1983:59). Spatial boundaries in school and barn settings are definite and clearly divided for men and women, except for this singular area in the threshing bay. Male and female visitors sit together, unlike the members of the group, who are segregated by sex. Young boys and unbaptized adolescent boys assemble with the men rather than in the central threshing area. Even in various stages of toddlerhood to late adolescence, male children reside in the men's section, while female children are situated in the center section of the barn threshing floor. By

inclusion in this socially ungendered area, visitors, nonbaptized persons, young girls, and female children of all ages are beings without ritual gender or status. They are arguably neither spiritually male nor female, nor are they adults in the sense of being "spiritually complete" baptized beings.

I observed highly structured and gender-linked use of space. River Brethren conceive of these spatial divisions as consecrated ritual and nonritual areas. Their worship structures have sacred and profane dimensions, and the congregation knows that sanctified areas are divided by gender, dictating where men and women might sit.[8] Women do not trespass into the men's space in the ritual setting. Likewise, the men do not venture into the women's breadmaking space or the women's section.

My view is that women's ritual action sanctifies the space in which they perform. Women's space is subjective, for when the ritual concludes, the women rearrange their chairs to face the forebay. Thus, the space that was sanctified by ritual action only a moment before becomes, as Heilman has noted, "ritually unattended . . . in the space but no longer really a part of what is going on in the space" (ibid., 51). This subjective space again becomes sanctified during the evening love feast, when the same spatial structure is restored in order for sisters to perform the subservient ritual of footwashing and holy communion.

While the congregation kneels, facing their chairs, the deacons lead the extemporaneous opening prayer, which concludes with the Lord's Prayer and a hymn. Men key the beginning of the women's performance by this impromptu portion of the traditional, formulaic two-part prayer: "[A]s we are now coming upon the service concerning the making of the bread, Lord, we ask that you look down upon us as we perform this sacred part of the service . . . we pray for the sisters as they now prepare this bread, Lord . . . as the sisters prepare and make the bread we will hear some Brethren speak forth from the Word and share thoughts that would pertain to the preparation, breadmaking, and to the love feast service" (Breadmaking Service Sermon 1994a). The Lord's Prayer ends the two-part prayer, and women quickly rise and gather around the table to begin their patterned action.

In the hierarchy of ritual performance, the wives derive their spiritual leadership from their husbands' status as authority figures in the congregation. The senior deacon's wife appropriates a leadership position. She grounds the ritual in the preparation and mixing of dough. The other sisters in the hierarchy are the wives of bishops, deacons, and ministers. They assist in the chores of rolling and shaping the dough on baking trays. They score the dough into strips so that each sister can participate by pricking it with the

fork. In orchestrating the breadmaking ritual, these wives of the male "elite" mirror their husbands' status. They attain additional status through senior ritual experience and through mentoring younger women, to whom they pass on the skills of directing the ritual. Despite this limited women's hierarchy, however, all sisters are essentially equal in ritual performance.

Since the sisters remain silent throughout the ritual, the senior deacon's wife employs nonverbal signals to indicate when the sisters must exchange and pass the dough. While the sisters perform the ritual in patterned movement, their men watch the women performing. Elders frame the women's ritual by preaching didactic messages concerning headship and the purity of women's veiling.

Sister Sara prepares for the ceremony by arranging baking utensils on the tables and organizing the setting for the ritual. She mixes the dough and subsequently makes sure that it is properly baked in the host family's oven. Since purity is an issue in breadmaking, the sisters wash their hands prior to the ritual. During passing and kneading, the senior deacon's wife keeps count of the sisters to see that each woman handles each lump of dough. The sister who formerly performed this ceremonial task noted, "Every time [the bread passed] she [the deacon's wife] laid down a toothpick to count. So that she knew how many times it passed, as many times as there were sisters" (E. Schubauer 1993). In the ritual tradition of enacting women's unity, the deacon's wife is careful to include each sister.

The senior deacon's wife checks the oven frequently. Communion bread has to be baked hard enough that it will not crumble to the touch, yet it cannot be browned; it is baked to remain white in color, symbolizing the purity of Christ and the purity of communion. The River Brethren view leaven as an impurity in the bread. White, unleavened bread symbolizes the spiritual cleansing that takes place in the performance of the ordinances of love feast weekend.

The senior deacon's wife choreographs the ritual by taking her prepared dough and tearing it into small, rounded pieces, about three inches in diameter. She places them on a metal baking sheet in preparation for the opening prayer. After the congregation kneels for prayer, the women quickly and silently surround the tables and began passing small pieces of dough to the sisters at the far end of the table.

These women are out of the kitchen and into the ritual, yet paradoxically, they are not: communally, they perform a sacred kitchen task in making communion bread. Each sister accepts her communion dough and silently begins

to knead it. At a signal from Sister Sara, each sister passes the lump of kneaded dough to the sister on her right. They resume kneading. The process of passing and kneading is repeated as many times as there are sisters, so that each piece of dough is handled by all sisters participating in the ritual.

All the women silently knead each of the individual pieces of dough for about a ten-minute interval. They place each piece on a tray, combining the dough into one large clump as it is passed down the center of the table. When all the individuals have added their small lumps of dough to the one large lump, each woman, in turn, comes to the head of the table and kneads the single, large clump of dough. Again, nonverbal signals from the senior deacon's wife, a nod of the head, a beckoning motion of the hand, cues each woman's turn to come forward to knead the large mass of dough.

The deacon's wife uses a "stick" (resembling a straightedge) to cut the dough into four equal portions, placing each quarter of the large clump on a single baking sheet. Paired women shape the dough into a large rectangle on each pan, one sister holding the pan, the other rolling the dough. Elders' wives grasp the four ritual measuring staves or "sticks" (two of walnut, which have been used for years, and two more recently made by the River Brethren) and carefully square the dough to the rectangular shape of the pans. When the dough is shaped, these sisters score the dough horizontally with the four wooden staves, marking it into strips about two inches wide. Each sister then chooses a single strip of rolled and flattened dough and scores it up one side and down the other with a fork, piercing through to the pan. (One sister has told me that this piercing represents the wounds of Christ to the River Brethren.) Piercing prevents the dough from bubbling, and makes the bread easier to break.

When all the sisters have scored and pierced the dough, the deacon's wife carries it to the kitchen to bake. Sisters share in the homely kitchen tasks of wiping clean and removing the rolling pins, forks, and sticks and cleaning off the tables. The moderator cues this change in focus: "We'll take a break now as we turn our chairs around to face the front, and we're going to now listen to the prophetic importance of Jesus' sufferings." Preachers' sermons focus on the women's "place" in the life of this community and on the relationships between women and men outlined in the traditional concept of headship. Their texts concern Paul's teachings on the husband as the head of the wife and emphasize the submissive wife as the keystone that supports the society. A persistent theme of breadmaking rhetoric—one essential to headship—is the women's prayer covering.

Bread: Binding Force for the Community

I believe that the exchange of bread in love feast communion mediates the passage of Old Order River Brethren through life. Strict Biblicists, Old Order River Brethren take literally Christ's injunction, "This do in remembrance of me until we partake in the kingdom of God." Communion bread signifies members' journey through earthly life to eternal life. An analysis of the ritual's social function suggests that preparing and baking unleavened bread generates cohesion and community among the River Brethren. The "incorporative" function of their bread makes it a potent sacred and social symbol for them (Goode 1992:233). Men stress this in their sermon rhetoric:

> You know that preparing this bread is a symbol of, in a sense, our preparation in our hearts and souls that brings us to where we become one in Him. And the bread is a part of as many sisters that are here, and it's going to be made in one lump, and it's composed of three things, in a sense, Father, Son, Holy Ghost, to bring flour from wheat, milk, and butter. . . . The flour takes refining and it's almost impossible to see what's taking place, but it breaks it down into fine pieces. The symbolic thing is that it's all put together in *one,* and then again we be partakers of it and we each have a part of it in our hearts and our souls . . . it brings newness in our hearts and our souls, old things have passed away. (Breadmaking Service Sermon 1993)

Consumed in the communion meal, bread is material proof of salvation and is a medium for River Brethren cultural expression. Sister Emily invests the bread with religious significance similar to that seen in the Catholic Eucharist, in which the bread becomes "flesh": "The bread is Jesus himself, in a sense. We can feed on him. 'This bread which we break is the communion of the body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.' That's what we say [as we pass the bread in love feast communion ritual]" (E. Schubauer 1993). In sermon discourse, River Brethren repeat that the bread is a symbol. However, women make frequent references to the bread as "the body." I observe that in kneading, women carefully take small pieces of the dough that fall away or adhere to the table and painstakingly combine the bits of dough back into the large lump before the sisters knead it for a final time. They handle it reverently, carefully avoiding dropping or "losing" small pieces that break away.

River Brethren women charge bread with sentiment as the body of Christ. It implies sacrifice, redemption, and salvation. I saw that making bread is women's work, scripted by men; the breadmaking compels women to serve the community's spiritual needs. Through the symbolic manipulation of this sacred substance, women stand as surrogates for the congregation. Women enable the watching River Brethren to comprehend the mystery of sharing communally in the body of Christ.

Aside from its religious significance, communion bread serves as a catalyst for social interaction. In its ability to draw the congregation together in a familial ritual, breadmaking encourages "close communion." For this group, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular spheres of life. Holy living and the social interaction of breadmaking are so intimately governed by piety that one cannot separate the significance of sacred food from the social interactions of making it and the unspoken value systems connected to ritual food.

Breadmaking is a preparation for the collective eating event of love feast communion. The term "love feast" is indicative of symbolic foodways connected to religious experience. "Feast" implies festival, celebration, cohesion, community, and surfeit. It is a "stuffing" of oneself with love. The River Brethren recognize this in sermon discourse: "We say we have love feast. I think it's a very apt term . . . a 'feast of love'" (Breadmaking Service Sermon 1993).

The bread is meaningful as a central symbol in a greater system of symbols in this female ritual. If one argues that foods given meaning in ceremony encode social events, then the ritual of breadmaking is a statement of the exclusivity of the group, since the group recognizes the ritual as unique (Kalčik 1984:47–48). Sister Anna describes this sense of unity: "[W]e're all one lump. We want to be one lump in God's hands . . . it's all our own work, . . . we [sisters] all had our part in it. . . . [We are] one body. I do think of it when I have that piece of bread in my hand, and I think of how I can handle that any way I want to handle it. . . . It just is in your hands and you can do as you want to it. And that's the way I think our lives should be. That God could work with us like that" (A. Schubauer 1993).

In his study of a food festival expressing community values in southern Indiana, Simon Bronner has reflected that "A feminine task . . . becomes the assumption of a ceremonial function" (Bronner 1986:175). So it is in the ceremonial feminine kitchen task of breadmaking. The ordinary yet unique feminine work of mixing and kneading the dough makes the ritual function of breadmaking an object lesson. Asked why women are given this

task, Sister Emily emphasizes, "Well, it's a kitchen task. And I think that [even if] we did accept women's lib, that would not make it any different" (E. Schubauer 1993). Sisters' feminine task is to model traditional behaviors to Old Order River Brethren that reinforce the values of their culture (Kalčik 1984:59). Emily contends that the value of submission in the making of communion bread remains invariant, even if one regards it from the unlikely viewpoint of "women's lib," which, for the sisters, symbolizes disorder and all that is threatening to the group. The ritual is a major communicative event for transmitting basic messages about social roles and relationships in the maintenance of the group (Goode 1992:234).

Bread, culturally central in the predominant "dough" pattern of Pennsylvania German cuisine, is considered a security food. Studies have shown that in times of stress, people consume large quantities of "security" foods, such as bread and milk (Jones 1988:243). Old Order River Brethren link bread to the ritual reinforcement of social values, preventing the fragmentation of the group and thereby ensuring its survival in a hostile environment. As such, even symbolic ritual communion bread can be viewed as a security food whose binding characteristics in ritual preserve the community. As Susan Kalčik has asserted, the symbolic manipulation of food allows individuals and groups to make statements about identity (Kalčik 1984:54). In women's symbolic handling of bread in this ritual, community is intimately conjoined with bread in a rite that helps ensure the distinctiveness and separation of the River Brethren from a dangerous world.

Language and Gesture: Object Lessons for the Community

Breadmaking has a language of its own. In the language of breadmaking, women and men communicate by means of both words and silence. Women and men also use figures of speech to describe the ritual that reveals the relationship between Old Order River Brethren religion and community. This woman's devotion is interpreted by means of figurative language and appeals to tradition, men's sermon rhetoric, and women's postures and gestures. The sisters' silence allows them to enact the role of sacrificial servants to the community.

Woman's distinctive language in ritual is exclusively gestural. The senior deacon's wife gives the nonverbal signals that cue the women into action. The sisters' motions of kneading and passing the dough are grounded in physical actions that communicate with the River Brethren.

Women's gestures have a close association with speech because they are an expression of ideas. Although women are voiceless in breadmaking, their action is a metaphor for speaking. Adam Kendon has suggested that a special elaboration of gesture is found in religious ritual and that gestures "find expression in ceremonial acts" (Kendon 1992:179–80). Sisters stand silent, with their heads inclined around their worktables. This gesture bespeaks humility and submission to the "family" of the community. I maintain that in ritual action, women's very persons symbolize the values that this society holds essential to its nonassimilation. By drawing themselves into postures of humility around their work tables, these women give "bodily form to the symbols they [represent]" (Rappaport 1992:255).

While women use silence and gesture to pass on group values of obedience, Old Order River Brethren preachers frequently use figurative language to expound on the breadmaking. Men predominantly employ metaphors to connect the sisters' action to oral sermon texts. Sermon analogies are used as a teaching device to instruct a listening and watching audience. These analogies serve as object lessons in preparation for love feast. The preachers teach cultural and spiritual values, emphasizing submission and breaking of the individual will. Metaphors directly link concrete, physical objects to abstract religious ones. Preachers design these object lessons for the community; their metaphors make use of the immediate, the experiential, and the concrete. Sister Emily struggles to describe this process of analogy and metaphor in men's and women's breadmaking discourse.

> Every now and then you might work the bread one way and another way. . . . Yes, this could relate to such a circumstance in my life, and you think of natural things [women refer to "natural things" as their feminine domestic duties and culturally assigned roles] relating unto spiritual things. You can relate [breadmaking] to a spiritual idea. So this is how the Lord is teaching me, and it doesn't matter which way I move this bread, I have to . . . make it good bread, and match my own life, too. (E. Schubauer 1993)

Analogies used as object lessons instruct the congregation in living the holy life. Men's rhetoric stresses two dominant themes: purity and obedience. "Brokenness," "being yielded," and "refining" are metaphors for obedience and "working" by God, and leaven is a symbol for impurity and sinfulness.

Both sermon rhetoric and women's reflective responses to men's discourse illustrate these themes. Wheat or bread is a metaphor for "refining," or making oneself pure, in preparation for breadmaking and love feast and in one's spiritual life. The concept of pride and impurity in one's personal and spiritual life is connected to leaven, an unwanted component in the recipe for communion bread. Thus, getting rid of impurities and pride in one's personal life is a "recipe" for the inner, holy life.

Women's personal views of breadmaking reflect the metaphoric language of preachers' exhortations. Sisters consistently echo common metaphors that men utter repeatedly in preaching. Women liken the ingredients of bread to the Trinity. Sister Martha talked to me about the "refining that we go through spiritually," just as the wheat is refined for flour. "The wheat . . . signifies unity, and that nobody is better than anyone else . . . we all have a part, and it takes everybody [to make the bread]. Once it's together, there's no way you can take it apart; it's like the sisters each working, they're all together, having one lump [of dough]. The refining that we go through spiritually . . . makes us pliable in God's hands" (M. Schubauer 1993). Sister Emily's description of breadmaking metaphor reflects sermon images as well:

> [The brothers] always speak about the bread. There's three ingredients in the bread, and they relate a little bit to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They [Brethren] speak about the flour, how we don't know where it came from. The wheat, if there's a piece would be in there while we're working in it, and it would most likely fall out [or be] worked out. . . . And so they're saying in our Christian life, if we're allowing the Lord to work us and knead us like we do the bread, that something that shouldn't be in our life would be found. . . . That's how our lives are supposed to be. Not be working with unpure things. They're [men] speaking to us about our lives, rather than just about the bread. (E. Schubauer 1993)

Other sisters repeat metaphors that men employ in their sermon discourse. "Wheat—we don't know where it comes from . . . once it's together,

there's no way you can take it apart. Like the sisters each working—after they're all together, having one lump of dough, there's no way you can take out the individual parts. That signifies unity. Nobody is better than anyone else, and we all have a part. It takes everybody. The refining that we go through spiritually . . . [makes us] pliable in God's hands" (A. Schubauer 1993).

In the almost formulaic repetition of the preachers' sermon discourse and in the members' verbal recall of sermon rhetoric, women and men elaborate recurrent themes. Women's and men's narratives frequently cite the difficulties experienced in preparing the bread. The element they talk about—the texture of the dough—is different for each breadmaking. Bread functions metaphorically as a test of faith for the participants. For women, overcoming obstacles in preparing the bread for communion is a metaphor for life's trials and a testing of sisters' faith. The dough texture, either "sticky" (too pliable) or "brittle" (easily broken), serves as a metaphor for obedience. "Brokenness" is a proper attitude in the rigor of spiritual life. River Brethren frequently mention the softness or brittleness of the bread in sermon references. The symbolism varies, depending on the breadmaking experience and the dough texture itself. In the sisters' narratives, the bread takes on the characteristics of a living entity:

> Each breadmaking is different. One time we had [bread dough] so dry . . . it just took a lot of work to get it to go into one bowl. It didn't want to go into one bowl. . . . The last time it was so wet, and how did Martha word that? She said it was sticky, but "that's what I want to do, I want to stick to the Lord." I just needed that, because someone had suggested we add flour to it. And I said, "No, I just think if each of us pray, it's just not going to stick to the rolling pin." And it didn't. It didn't stick to our hand. And like, it came off of my hand. Although it was wetter than I've ever worked bread. And when [the dough] was harder, sometimes when the sisters worked it, it would get softer. The [resulting] texture was brittle. And so we're just all holding our breath. And I'm just saying, "It's the Lord trying to tell us this is how we are." We're all so brittle that we just . . . fall apart [without the Lord]. (E. Schubauer 1993)

With its figures of speech, in which bread is the central metaphor of divine communication, this declaration illustrates the utter obedience women

manifest toward God the Father, who discloses his will for their lives even through the texture of the bread.

Sisters: Self-Image and Bonding in the Feminine Community

As late as the 1970s, when Beulah Hostetler documented a River Brethren love feast for *Pennsylvania Folklife,* breadmaking was commonly held on Friday evening, and occasionally it still is today. By the 1990s, breadmaking had been moved to Saturday morning so that the main love feast activities could happen in one day. Now breadmaking shares the time with the service traditionally allotted to the suffering of Christ and the headship chapter, so there is less time for each. With a number of subjects to be covered in the sermons during the love feast, there is pressure to make every minute count. Sister Emily, a leader of the ritual, told me, "Well, the first time I did the ritual, I never watched the clock when we made bread. There's been a couple of times Daniel [her husband, the minister] said to me, you know, please be done by ten. And all of a sudden you know, we had to make sure that it [the breadmaking paraphernalia] was out of there and the sisters were in their places for the worship. We had to pass the bread quicker, I believe" (E. Schubauer 1993).

Women also talk about the pressures created by the simultaneous performances of men and women. Although most members would not see a conflict in the interests of men and women during the service, some of the women wonder aloud whether their handling of the bread distracts from the men's performance and whether men's expectations for women's performance interfere with women's meditation and self-examination in the ritual. Sister Emily comments,

> [Not hurrying breadmaking] would give us a little more time, and sometimes afterwards, the sisters had time to say how they feel [in testimony]. We have testimony meetings, but a lot of times it's not about the bread, now. We're thinking about the love feast instead. . . . We had our hands so busy . . . your attention might be taken away from . . . something you wanted to meditate on, but then your attention got

> to something else . . . and then you say, oh, I'd just like to hear the rest of that [sermon message] again. (ibid.)

Women and men share the responsibility of preparation for love feast, and they are anxious that the ritual be perfect. Sisters work together to prevent disaster in ritual performance. In one instance, when the preparation of the dough went wrong, sisters prayed communally to ensure that the dough did not stick to the rolling pin, thus preventing them from completing the crucial task of providing communion bread for love feast. Dread of responsibility and of making mistakes in ritual reflect women's self-consciousness in standing out as individuals in a ritual that is communal. They are acutely conscious of the gaze of the gathered congregation. Sister Emily emphasizes that "[women] don't really want to be individually sticking out" in performance (ibid.).

The women's discourse illustrates a core value of the culture—self-abnegation. Sister Emily evaluates herself in the leadership position of senior deacon's wife:

> I'm not quite sure why I have the responsibilities I do, because I'm a better follower than I am a leader. . . . [In ritual] you're standing up in front of everybody, which is not my favorite thing. I think some people live or thrive on that type of thing, but not me. . . . Oh, I'd be so glad if someone else would just tell me what to do in some situations. You know, you'd just be so glad if someone else would tell you what to do, because then that would be all your responsibility is, just *do* it. I'd rather not make any of them [decisions], because then I'm responsible for them once I make them. (ibid.)

Each step of the breadmaking process involves risks, from the viewpoint of the River Brethren women. Sister Anna comments on the important task faced by the wives of the deacons, ministers, and bishops: "When you roll the bread, you have to be careful not to roll it real fast, because then it gets bubbles in it" (A. Schubauer 1993). In interviews, several sisters admit anxiety in performing the ritual. They worry about committing a blunder, thus calling attention to themselves individually. Ritual goals are not focused on pride and self-assertiveness, as in most public enactments. Rather, in their use of attitude, posture, and gesture, women collectively embody self-effacement and humility in this kitchen task.

Characteristically, women's and men's views of ritual roles do not intersect. Women regard themselves as "sisters," but in sermon rhetoric, men conceptualize them using maternal images. Women's and men's discourse demonstrate dissimilarities in their views of the ritual regarding gender expectations and social needs. Sisters visualize their breadmaking role as inclusive of women. They perceive themselves as a community, a sisterhood. In their eyes, the community is different from that of the men, but not inferior.

Men envision women as metaphorical mothers and wives. These distinctions are critical to River Brethren cultural definitions of femininity. This exclusively female ritual celebrating River Brethren women's traditional domestic roles is missing a corresponding male rite. Preachers' exhortations during breadmaking highlight the subordinate, wifely image in their sermons and ritual discourse. One brother stated in his breadmaking sermon that the sisters were all "endeavoring, laboring, to bring about something to perfection." Breadmaking as "laboring" to achieve perfection may be seen as a reproductive image of the pursuit of sanctification, giving insight into male perceptions of the ritual maternal role of these women.

As a novice, Emily recognizes that older, experienced women pass on to her their techniques in orchestrating ritual performance.

> [W]e have older Bishops that are not as active. So the wives then also gave up that responsibility [to lead] to the younger wives . . . and they would be there to support them or to answer any questions or to help. . . . Irma was right there, always by my side the first many times. . . . When Irma couldn't stand up with us, then Daniel's mother was the Bishop's wife, and she and I would do [breadmaking] together, and I'd say, "should we do this?" and she'd say, "yes," and we decided together. . . . When Daniel was put in as a minister, then Sara was [leader]. So then I worked with Sara for a while. (E. Schubauer 1993)

Women establish female alliances among the circle of participating sisters, and they invoke sisterly images to describe their relationships in ritual. Emily describes the oneness of the sisters' devotion (and her trepidation at leading them in ritual): "all these are my sisters, and this overwhelming responsibility of having so many sisters. . . . Each sister has a responsibility, but it's also a blessing." Sister Martha notes these relationships connected to the ritual:

> Each of us has our own portion of it [the dough, the ritual], and so I'm passing . . . to my sisters [which] signifies to me that if there's anything [impure] in my life, it's probably going to affect my sisters. What I may fail to do, the sister next to me will do [in breadmaking and in life]. When it's all together [the dough], that shows you we're one . . . because you can't take it apart and say, "Now I did that." So we all have our part, but nobody can say that mine's better or say, "That's what I did." (M. Schubauer 1993)

Public as it is, the ritual is still an intense, private feminine experience. The intimacy engendered by this ritual interaction among women in breadmaking and communion fosters cohesion, a feeling of sisterhood. Sister Martha characterizes this feeling: "It's always beautiful when you pass the bread to your sisters . . . it's just so meaningful and special that you can't talk about it" (ibid.).

For River Brethren women, breadmaking is a ritual of inclusion. One sister described making communion bread as a "closeness of being with your sisters . . . a fellowship with them. It's not just about making bread, we're drawn close together, I think" (A. Schubauer 1993). Sisters note that all have a part in it. Sister Anna declares that "anyone that is there [at the breadmaking service] is to be included . . . every sister has a piece [of dough]. It's important to be in one mind . . . and believe that we're all sisters. We belong to the same fellowship and we feel that we should love one another, that we're concerned and help each other. [Breadmaking] is all our own, our work, we all had our part in it" (ibid.).

Rachael Keller, a ninety-two-year-old River Brethren woman, reflects on the given-ness of breadmaking. "How do you know what to do in breadmaking, and when to do it?" I ask. Sister Rachael responds, "You do it all your life—you just *know* what to do" (Rachael Keller 1993). For her and for others in the sect, the rules of ritual are learned by intense communication among women, by word of mouth, gesture, and imitation.

Describing their roles in breadmaking, women appeal to tradition. When I asked her to explain why breadmaking is a woman's devotion, Sister Martha says, "traditionally the women always make the bread" (M. Schubauer 1993). She considers the ritual primarily a woman's event. Sister Anna describes breadmaking as "mainly a woman's task . . . because that's what a woman does, making food" (A. Schubauer 1993).

These comments reflect women's symbolic role as foodgivers in Old Order River Brethren culture. Women are spiritual sisters who "feed the

sheep," metaphorically, spiritually, and materially (Curran 1989:115). Martha's statement, "and so I'm passing on to my sisters what I just worked [kneaded]," exemplifies not merely the physical act, but also the continuity and the awareness that sisters pass tradition from one to another, generation to generation. Martha asserts that "we think about the significance in what we're doing" (M. Schubauer 1993). In making sacred food, the traditional role of woman as foodgiver merges with the maternal role—woman as nurturer in the cultural sphere. The sisters in religious ritual provide "food" for their "family," the community. Performing breadmaking, a sister's individual self is subsumed in the collective, but women compensate for this loss by forming mutual bonds, bolstering the feminine will to nurture community.

Appropriating Women for Identity and Survival

The abundant use of touch between person and object in the breadmaking serves to elevate women's ritual role above men's. Simon Bronner and Roy Rappaport, in related essays, have proposed the cultural importance of ritualized touch to establish reality in social ceremonies (Bronner 1982b; Rappaport 1992:259). Repeated touching and "working" the dough is not simply intellectually conceived but also directly experienced (Rappaport 1992:259).

The use of the body to act out abstract religious and social concepts defines the values behind those abstract concepts. Touch and bodily movement in breadmaking give substance to "sacred postulates" that can bind the abstract religious belief to immediate experience (ibid.). Thus, my argument is that River Brethren women embody the ability to mediate between the spiritual and the natural worlds, converting abstract spiritual beliefs into concrete meanings knowable directly through the senses.

In breadmaking, the River Brethren use the "touchstone concept" extensively, the use of touch as a criterion by which to apprehend and measure the "categorical reality of cultural phenomena" (Bronner 1986:125). The breadmaking is so grounded in the sense of touch that the touchstone concept seems an essential dimension of the experience of the sisters' ritual. For River Brethren women, touch is a metaphor for "knowing," and what is critical to be known in the "sign" (bread) is the signified

(the body of Christ) (Rappaport 1992:259). I would hypothesize that this immediacy—applying all the senses of sight, smell, taste, and touch to the bread—gives women at that moment a superior spiritual quality, one that surpasses men's. Touch and the other senses unite in ritual to make real "the most abstract and distant of conceptions" (ibid.). It is touch, above all, that renders this River Brethren cultural phenomenon, breadmaking, a means by which to experience deeply the body of Christ.

I suggest that breadmaking is, in River Brethren culture, a social contract that is embedded in religious ritual and symbolic behavior. Following Rappaport on the cultural significance of touch, I would add that breadmaking is an "evocative contactual and manipulatory experience . . . calling into play the sense[s] . . . which embodied tactile experience in food consumption, yet which imparted a powerful spiritual message" (Rappaport 1992:254). The sense of sight brings "re-cognition," a recalling and comprehending of that which the bread symbolizes. Touch comprises the powerful, immediate encounters that women experience in handling the bread. The fragrance of the dough connects with its taste and eventual consumption in love feast; its physical absorption and incorporation into the body represents the spiritual process of becoming and joining in oneness with God and with the collective, which participates in its ritual of consumption. By connecting sensory experience to the spiritual, women transform a simple, concrete kitchen task into an intense religious experience.

Sister Anna refers to the tactile experience of breadmaking as the "privilege of kneading," in which women participate in making the bread with all its attendant touching and kneading of the dough (A. Schubauer 1993). Love feast communion further expands this sensory experience of breadmaking. In communion, for example, each baptized sister extends a hand to receive the bread, to cradle it on her arm, and then to break off a piece and extend it hand-to-hand to her sister.

Likewise, piercing the dough with a five-pronged fork makes Christ's wounds—the hands, the feet, the side—real through the senses. Piercing is a concrete experience, a touching of the symbolic object to bring about "cognition of the sacred" (Bronner 1982a:119). This homely physical act, denied to men of the River Brethren, is reminiscent of that performed by the Apostle Thomas, who touched Christ's wounds in order to apprehend the mystical experience of resurrection.

In the sisters' concrete religious experience, kneading the dough comprises human gestures that communicate salvation, redirecting physical

hunger to a symbolic hunger for God (Curran 1989:53). Breadmaking is a ritual manipulation that relies on women's stylized, patterned action to bring about the creation of the sacred substance, immediate and subjective, yet having powerful symbolism (Bronner 1982a:119). In the preparation and consumption of unleavened bread in the evening love feast, the River Brethren translate their need for restoration to God through the communion metaphors of hunger and satiety. Women's continued handling of the bread dough underscores the messages sent by the object: the bread is, simultaneously, a cultural symbol of submission, a social symbol of unity, and a religious symbol of redemption.

One sister's remark—"Something is missing in love feast communion when I don't participate in breadmaking"—equates touching and feeling with her awareness of religious conviction (Spangler 1992). Kneading the bread infuses reality into the abstract concept of communion as a symbol of salvation; indeed, the women's spiritual and religious experience in breadmaking is largely communicated by the action of working the dough. Sister Anna declares the immediacy of religious feeling she experiences as a result of handling it: "Well, I was very impressed the last time when we worked the bread. . . . I just thought it was kind of special. The last time we took this bread, you know, it was so soft and it was really different than any I believe we ever handled. And I just said it was like you just press it, you know, and now I could let the Lord just handle me like that" (A. Schubauer 1993).

What is significant about the men of this sect merely looking at the ritual experience while women do the touching? Sight offers a verifying judgment on reality, as well as a metaphor for understanding (Bronner 1982b:351–52). Men's gaze is fixed upon women's ritual action in breadmaking performance, and they rely upon sight alone for their apprehension of this ritual. In a paradoxical reversal of role and status, women's hands-on experience empowers them, giving them a superior role to the visual and verbal roles taken by the men—roles imposed by gender division. Therefore, women's haptic experience in breadmaking gives them a part in the pursuit of holiness exclusive of and superior to the men's verbal and visual experience. Sister Emily identifies the quest for holiness embodied in breadmaking: "you know you're going to get out of this mud and all these things here [earthly life] and be lifted up" (E. Schubauer 1993).

Thus, women's tactile role in breadmaking is especially significant in this religion. Through touch, women experience a subjective, positive affirmation of their caregiving role in the community and of their preeminence as

creators and preservers of holiness. The symbolism of kneading the bread—or, as Martha refers to it, the "spiritual significance of it"—reinforces sisterhood and group identity. Bread becomes the expression of Old Order values of cohesion and community, the division of men's and women's roles within the sect, and the female pursuit of sanctification and redemption. Through the religious authority allowed her in breadmaking, the Old Order River Brethren woman briefly assumes the power to enact religious and social roles that maintain group identity.

Although men have leadership roles in Old Order River Brethren society, women have the literal power to "make or break" the group. My view is that River Brethren women have to accept social customs and gender roles that allow this culture to persist in separation from the world. Sisters would not voice this acceptance as male repression; rather, they refer to submission as a posture for all Christians to take before God. They recognize their roles as different from those of men, but they do not consider themselves inferior. Women collaborate with men to keep order in the home and in society. It is men who summon women from the domestic sphere—indeed, who appropriate the domestic sphere as the arena in which the battle against change and assimilation will be waged. As a result, women are endowed with great ritual potency. In fact, the River Brethren are one of the few plain groups that permit women any voice in worship other than singing. River Brethren women also pray audibly at the table at home, which is unusual among plain sects. And in breadmaking, for a limited interval, sisters effect a social structure with women at the center.

In their breadmaking ceremony, River Brethren women are spiritual beings presenting themselves in ritual action as visible, human symbols of River Brethren values. A ritual grounded in domesticity allows women to sacralize and elevate the home, hearth, family, and the women's sphere. The woman celebrates herself as a guardian of community values and a transmitter of those values in her physical person, in her posturing of these values in ritual performance.

The roles of women as mothers, wives, and sisters sustain the community physically and spiritually. This ceremony transmits the tradition of this group across the generations, as it has done for aging women like Rachael Keller. Ritual obedience guarantees continuity from generation to generation, as women are educated by imitation and oral communication. Older women continue the ritual as tradition bearers for the younger women, who perpetuate the tradition with their daughters.

River Brethren women, who conceive of themselves as sisters, reinforce the identity of the group by enacting customary attitudes of humility, subservience, and submission. Women's roles in breadmaking are an endorsement of the ordering of life in River Brethren culture. The ritual "kitchen task" that requires women's silent submission is an object lesson, as Robert Orsi has contended, in which women belong "unmistakably and plainly in the home, as a patient, silent, self-sacrificing helpmeet and caretaker" (Orsi 1985:211). To be sure, men have their separate symbols of submission that pronounce their obedience to God and their different roles in the social structure. But I would highlight the special roles women assume in the social order, especially as culture bearers who strengthen the traditions of the community. Pressured by cultural change and social movements such as feminism, the group draws women out of the domestic sphere in order to defend, publicly, their way of life through the expressive culture of women's traditional dress, foodways, and ritual. Women play a significant role in deterring cultural assimilation by collaborating with men to ward off modern intrusions and to maintain traditional group values and practices. Following the guidance of the Bible, plain groups such as the River Brethren recognize the distinction between male and female as a significant basis for plain society.

Old Order River Brethren women submit to their husbands and to the collective, but like women in other Old Orders, they, too, are largely misunderstood by the public (Olshan and Kraybill 1994:215–16). My study demonstrates that these women have a vastly dissimilar worldview from that held by women in mass society. Outsiders often stereotype plain women as drudges to domineering men, women who are coerced and co-opted into unquestioning obedience and who are subject to abuses of power within the group. In interpreting themselves, River Brethren women voice a different perspective. They are women who seek freedom from the necessity to make decisions, who welcome men's direction for their welfare. They value marriage, family, and the ordered social structure as worthwhile pursuits. Paradoxically, they also play a leading role in group rituals that are essential to the group's definition and survival. These women are, above all else, mothers and wives. They spend their energies bearing and rearing children, producing food and clothing, and concerning themselves with the spiritual welfare of their families. Their world is composed of husbands, home, children, and worship.

Given this worldview, then, the use of gender as a model for the maintenance of sectarian culture is appropriate—yet few scholarly studies or

public heritage presentations have employed it as a focus. To ignore gender is to compromise a full understanding of sectarian women and men within their culture. To simply label Old Order groups as patriarchal or authoritarian is a shallow approach to their study. It neglects the crucial role that women play in preserving Old Order traditions.

The role of Old Order River Brethren women in their unique breadmaking ritual illustrates the significance of women upholding tradition. Apart from superficial similarities in appearance, a subtly different profile of Old Order River Brethren women emerges in comparison to women in Amish, Mennonite, and Hutterite societies. The distinctions between River Brethren women and Amish and Mennonite women are reflected in how each group upholds its culture and its boundaries. Old Order River Brethren accept technological advances and appropriate women and women's traditions to maintain their boundaries.

The fact that this Old Order group is separated, yet accepting of North American technology, necessitates a revised definition of what is "plain." The attitudes of plain groups toward technology—in particular, Amish attitudes—have become more prominent in our popular literature, I believe, because Americans question the loss of the pastoral in a mass culture represented by ever-advancing technology. Historically, the suspicion of modern technology by plain groups became conspicuous during the twentieth century. Some plain groups rejected certain aspects of technology—notably cars, electricity, and telephones. Other groups, such as the River Brethren, felt that these innovations were acceptable if used properly, and they typically imposed restrictions on entertainment devices. The River Brethren, in fact, are not all-accepting of technology. They draw a line at television, for instance. Stephen Scott has called it "a very important area of separation from the world." As he puts it, "Having worked around nonplain people a great deal I have observed that the lives of most Americans are dominated by the influence of television and other forms of entertainment. In this respect the River Brethren and similar groups make a very important distinction" (Scott 1999). All groups are selective, to a point. For the River Brethren, plainness means simplicity. It joins them to other groups, even as they understand and embrace the religious and material distinctions between their tiny community and others. Stephen Scott elaborated on the intangible as well as tangible distinctions of the group when he wrote, "The areas of worship, religious devotion, moral purity, and integrity separate the River Brethren, the Beachy Amish, and the Old

German Baptists from the dominant society as much as the horse and buggy is a means of separation for the Amish" (ibid.).

The popular literature narrowly profiles outward appearance as the definition of plainness. In the few references in popular literature to the River Brethren, a special ambiguity is evident because of the apparent conflict presented by the group's conservative plain dress and their selective use of technology. The world views their "plainness" and their modernity in opposition to each other, as a contradiction, though the River Brethren themselves do not.

Future of the Old Order River Brethren

What does the future hold for this tiny sectarian group? The experiences of other Old Order groups should serve as a warning to the River Brethren. Upward mobility, professional occupations and occupations for women, exposure to public entertainment, consumerism, and social movements such as feminism—along the loss of rural orientation, as suburbs encroach on their schools and homes—all increase engagement with the world. If Old Order River Brethren begin to see the world as nonthreatening and congenial, the need for boundary maintenance through submission, dress, and worship will inevitably erode.

My study of women's use of tradition to build cohesion in the family and community has implications for larger society as well. The model of cooperation between women and men in order to preserve cultural cohesion may afford alternatives to conflict between the sexes. The River Brethren present an old-fashioned lesson for the larger society that encompasses them: women and men need to cooperate to maintain family relationships and restraints on human behavior (a cooperation that larger society has all but cast aside). As I listen to the River Brethren, I begin to think that their emphasis on self-mastery and community cohesion affords them a security and freedom from self-doubt to which moderns might well aspire.

Old Order River Brethren quietly live their traditions surrounded by mass culture. They remain *in* mass society, but not *of* it. They stand as a contrast and a conscience to the dominant society. This small group calls women out of the domestic sphere to maintain the group's differences,

expressed through distinctive dress, ritual, and traditional foodways. River Brethren women, culture bearers who preserve customary roles and symbolic behaviors, have a critical part in maintaining the identity and insuring the survival of the Old Order River Brethren.

Women's submissive roles—ones that most American women perceive as anachronistic—predominate in Old Order River Brethren society. Sisters who engage in these behaviors do not do so blindly, as I had once thought. They consciously choose to cooperate with men in maintaining these behaviors so that their society might persist in its separation from the values of dominant society.

River Brethren women and men are not flawless or otherworldly. In an imperfect American society, however, River Brethren attempt to live their religion by shouldering the burden for the well-being of others at the expense of the extreme individual self-will that is characteristic of modern Americans. To do this requires self-discipline and self-sacrifice—especially for women.

Like other mainstream women concerned about the welfare of women in American society, I do not easily understand or accept the choices of Old Order River Brethren women. Though I formerly rejected their choices as old-fashioned, I have learned to appreciate the delicate balance between the authority that men hold over their women and the high regard that men have for them in their role of uniting the community. River Brethren women's roles and symbolic behavior ensure cooperation between women and men that preserves each River Brethren generation in stable traditions of faith and family.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. For a full description of an Old Order River Brethren love feast, see Hostetler 1974–75.

2. Historically, the group had linked marriage and baptism. That is, one could not marry unless both partners were baptized into the sect. That is no longer true today. Baptism and the love feast, of which breadmaking is a part, are linked, for a woman cannot participate in love feast unless she is a baptized member. However, love feast is not restricted to married women. Single women, baptized and having full membership, may freely participate in the ritual.

3. Testimony and preaching follow the breadmaking. Women and men rise, line out a hymn that has personal significance, and share individual testimony with the congregation. For women, this testimony is affective and quietly emotional. Their testimony expresses gratitude to God, recounts blessings, often demonstrates self-effacement and feelings of unworthiness, and sometimes recounts a personal experience that has spiritual meaning to the sister

who shares it. The scriptural injunction of Saint Paul forbids women to teach or preach for edification; therefore, women's testimonies reflect personal experience and emotion.

4. Exhortation is not conversational, unlike much of the preaching. Exhortation is characterized by louder, firmer speech tones, uses persuasion, and appeals to emotions to press the message home. It is not performed in the heavy emotional preaching style of television evangelists or revival gatherings.

5. See Yoder 1990. Don Yoder's essays comment on the link between the agricultural orientation of Pennsylvania Germans and their ecclesiastical calendar and religious traditions.

6. See also Patricia Curran's *Grace Before Meals* (1989) for an analysis of culturally created space in the Catholic convent. In *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Edward T. Hall has used the term "proxemics" for culturally created environments and the effects on inhabitants of the messages coded in spatial organization and management.

7. I draw on the theories of Arnold Van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (1960), 184–89, and of Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* (1977), 94–130. See also Hermansen 1991.

8. The terms "sacred" and "profane" refer to the subjective space Heilman discusses in *Synagogue Life* (1976).

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LIST OF INFORMANTS

FLORENCE MAY BRANDT
Mt. Joy, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: June 3, 1954
Housewife; five children; convert (transfer)
Interview date: Dec. 26, 1995

BONNIE BRECHBILL
Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pa.
Date of birth: Oct. 10, 1954
Housewife and freelance writer; one child; convert (transfer)
Interview date: Jan. 18, 1993

DWAINE BRECHBILL
Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pa.
Date of birth: July 7, 1951
Farmer
Interview date: Jan. 18, 1993

ANNA MAY BURKHART
Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pa.
Date of birth: Dec. 8, 1920
Housewife; three children
Interview date: Jan. 18, 1993

NORMAN BURKHART
Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pa.
Date of birth: Feb. 27, 1922
Interview date: Jan. 18, 1993

ANNA MAE CAIN
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: March 28, 1947
Housewife; six children
Interview date: Dec. 30, 1995

DELLA CAIN
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Oct. 20, 1944
Housewife; three children
Interview date: Dec. 27, 1995

LEVI CAIN
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Interview date: July 25, 1992

RUTH CAIN
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Dec. 25, 1947
Housewife; five children
Interview date: Dec. 26, 1995

DANIEL DEMEY
East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Interview date: Sept. 17, 1995

JANE DEMEY
Hellam Township, York County, Pa.
Date of birth: Sept. 27, 1954
Housewife; six children
Interview dates: April 12, 1995; Dec. 30, 1995

JAMES DIETRICH
Hellam Township, York County, Pa.
Date of birth: Aug. 30, 1954
Teacher, dairy farmer
Interview dates: July 10, 1992; July 12, 1992; Oct. 11, 1992; Nov. 23, 1992

JANE DIETRICH
Hellam Township, York County, Pa.
Interview date: April 12, 1995

LLOYD DIETRICH
Hellam Township, York County, Pa.
Date of birth: Jan. 12, 1932
History teacher, Lancaster Mennonite high school
Interview dates: Aug. 20, 1995; Sept. 3, 1995; Sept. 23, 1995

LOIS DIETRICH
Hellam Township, York County, Pa.
Date of birth: Jan. 26, 1930
Housewife; six children
Interview dates: Dec. 30, 1995; Jan. 8, 1996

LOUISE FAHNESTOCK
Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Interview date: July 19, 1995

NORA FAHNESTOCK
Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Nov. 21, 1941
Housewife, farmer's market; six children
Interview dates: July 19, 1995; Dec. 30, 1995

LOIS FARMER
Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Oct. 8, 1973
Single; market stand, domestic work
Interview date: July 19, 1995

ADA FARVER
East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: March 10, 1945
Housewife, storekeeper; seven children
Interview date: Dec. 27, 1995

KATHRYN FARVER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Jan. 11, 1956
Housewife; three children
Interview date: Jan. 4, 1996

SUSAN FARVER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Feb. 20, 1951
Housewife and nurse; five children; birthright
Interview date: Jan. 6, 1996

BERNICE HOFFMAN
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Dec. 12, 1944
Housewife, home office work; one child
Interview date: Jan. 7, 1996

SUSAN KAUFFMAN
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Sept. 24, 1947
Housewife, roadside stand; three children, one foster child
Interview date: Dec. 27, 1995

RACHAEL KELLER
Chambersburg, Franklin County, Pa.
Date of birth: Aug. 4, 1901
Retired housewife, widow; two children
Interview date: Jan. 18, 1993

DEBORAH MILLER
Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: March 6, 1949
Tourist meals; seven children
Interview date: May 27, 1995

JACOB MILLER
Rapho Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Dec. 21, 1945
Buggy rides, tourist meals
Interview date: May 27, 1995

ALICE SCHUBAUER
Mount Joy, Mount Joy Township, Pa.
Date of birth: Aug. 25, 1952
Housewife, seamstress; two children
Interview date: Dec. 27, 1995

ANNA SCHUBAUER
East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: June 10, 1914
Retired housewife, widow; four children
Interview date: Oct. 26, 1993

EDITH SCHUBAUER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Oct. 3, 1940
Single; printing company, computer operator
Interview date: June 24, 1995

ELIZA SCHUBAUER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Jan. 11, 1976
Single; baking enterprise
Interview dates: June 14, 1995; July 2, 1995

EMILY SCHUBAUER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Nov. 3, 1952
Housewife; three children
Interview dates: Oct. 5, 1993; July 2, 1995

MARTHA SCHUBAUER
East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: June 24, 1940
Single; school teacher
Interview date: Oct. 26, 1993

MARY MAE SCHUBAUER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: June 7, 1945
Housewife; four children
Interview dates: April 12, 1995; Jan. 2, 1996

REBECCA SCHUBAUER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Nov. 17, 1950
Housewife; five children
Interview date: Jan. 2, 1996

STEPHEN SCOTT
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: April 12, 1948
Writer, People's Place, Intercourse, Pa.
Interview dates: Nov. 23, 1992; Sept. 12, 1993; Nov. 29, 1995

ESTHER MAE SNYDER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Nov. 25, 1939
Housewife; six children
Interview date: Jan. 2, 1996

JOHN SNYDER
East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Aug. 4, 1922
Retired farmer, widower; two children
Interview date: March 17, 1996

HARRIET SPANGLER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Sept. 22, 1947
Housewife; three children; birthright
Interview dates: Nov. 23, 1992; Jan. 27, 1993; Jan. 5, 1996

JOHN STRICKLER
East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Interview date: March 30, 1996

REBECCA WITMER
West Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, Pa.
Date of birth: Jan. 10, 1970
Single; companion for disabled
Interview date: April 18, 1995

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