

Amish and Mennonite Share Many Beliefs

The Amish and Mennonites are Christians that share many religious beliefs and have common historical roots. Both religious groups can trace their beginnings to the 16th century when opposition to the Roman Catholic Church was widespread across Europe. Certain Christians believed that only adults should be baptized into the faith and were commonly referred to as “Anabaptists” or “re-baptizers.” This was a radical belief at the time and Anabaptists were often persecuted by other Protestants and Catholics. Menno Simons (1496-1561), a priest from the Netherlands, became an important leader in the Anabaptist movement and his followers became known as Mennonites.

As the Anabaptist movement continued into the 17th century, certain groups living primarily in Switzerland, Germany, and the southern Rhine River region objected to what they believed were liberalizing practices of the Mennonites. Jacob Ammann (1640-1720) became a prominent leader in the movement and followers are still identified by his name. The Amish suffered religious persecution and fled to sparsely populated areas in Switzerland and Germany where they developed a farming lifestyle and worshipped in members’ homes.

While generalizations are always open to exceptions, the two groups share commonalities. Both practice adult baptism, wear plain clothing, and believe in non-resistance (abstaining from military service, litigation, and sometimes



politics). Old Order Mennonites (more conservative Mennonites) and the Amish speak a German dialect erroneously called “Pennsylvania Dutch.”

The term Anabaptist is still commonly used to categorize the Amish, Mennonite, and Brethren churches but it is misleading since members are baptized one time. Only the early Anabaptist converts experienced two baptisms.

Differences between the two groups developed over the years as the Mennonites became more accepting of modern technology and higher education. Technology, including modern forms of transportation, is viewed as a means to evangelize. Mennonite worship services are held in church buildings and conducted in English. Mennonites are also more likely to blend in with the world around them and accept modern conveniences.

The Amish remain influenced by an eighteenth century lifestyle as they seek to separate themselves from the material world and modern technology. While the Amish are diverse, most groups use horse and buggy transportation, hold worship services in members’ homes, conduct religious services in German, limit formal education to eight years, avoid political party affiliation, and favor conservative clothing.

Thanks to our friend Al Boxley for his suggestions on this article.

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