

comments on nonconformity and ethical eschatology). Despite its disjointed construction as a compilation of sermons, lectures, and essays written for various contexts, it represents a valuable contribution to contemporary discussions about what Anabaptism looks like in the twenty-first century.

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Diane Zimmerman Umble and David L. Weaver-Zercher. *The Amish and the Media*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

If you want to avoid being in the media, try not to be too different from the surrounding culture: don't wear unique clothing, don't eschew technology and, for heaven's sake, don't have an aversion to being photographed or filmed. That, at least, seems to be the lesson of the Amish, especially for those living in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. For this unique member of the Anabaptist family, a desire to be separate from the world – and ignored by it – has resulted in a torrent of attention through books, articles, TV, movies, and tourists, and on the World Wide Web. At the same time, it has required members of that community to develop a certain kind of media savvy to cope with the ongoing fascination many North Americans have for their culture.

The goal of *The Amish and the Media* is to explore the complex and complicated issues raised by the telling, and selling, of the Amish story. This collection of 11 scholarly essays grew out of a 2001 conference titled “The Amish, Old Orders and The Media,” sponsored by the Young Center for Anabaptist Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College. The submissions, written by experts in areas such as film and media studies, American studies, poetry, anthropology, and history, provide valuable insights into not only how the media interpret the Amish, but also how the Amish themselves seek – to greater and lesser degrees – to mediate and influence the interpretation of their lives.

That 2001 conference might have provided the foundation for this book, but the tragic shooting of ten Amish girls at their schoolhouse in

Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania in October 2006 is the catalytic event that underscores it – and makes this book all the more relevant and important. The outpouring of worldwide media attention that followed the tragedy thrust the Amish into the limelight as never before and led to an examination of the complicated relationship between the Amish and the media by people on both sides, with some of the Amish wondering if they had gone too far in cooperating with reporters, and some reporters wondering if their profession had gone over the line at times in pursuit of the story. This event, which will likely be of highest interest to most readers, is given a detailed and illuminating exploration by Umble and Weaver-Zercher in their chapter, titled “The Amish, the Media and the Nickel Mines Shooting.”

The book also explores how the Amish have been portrayed in movies such as *Witness* and *Amish in the City*, in documentaries, poetry, and non-fiction, and through tourism. It also takes a look at the ways the Amish produce and consume media themselves – they may not permit TV-watching or the Internet, but they like to read and many subscribe to Amish-affiliated newspapers like *The Budget* and *Die Botschaft*.

The book itself raises an interesting question, and one that is lightly touched upon by the editors themselves: What is the role and responsibility of the writers and scholars in mediating the Amish to the world? Scholars are mediators too – in the classroom, in articles, and when they are interviewed by reporters about a group of people who prefer not to talk about themselves at all. What is their responsibility to the Amish, who would just as soon not be the subject of a report, but also to the media, who have a job to do and who will do it, whether or not they are aided by experts? That’s a question that anyone who works in media relations for religious or international development or North American anti-poverty organizations also wrestles with; it could be an interesting subject for a future conference.

This book will be of interest to anyone who is interested in the media portrayal of the Amish, and to those who want to know more about the issue of religion and the media in general – as seen through the lens of this media-shy yet highly visible group of people.

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