

The Hutterites: Lives and Images of a Communal People

SAMUEL HOFER

Saskatoon, SK: Hofer Publications, Box 94, Saskatoon, SK, S7K 7G5, 1998. Illustrations. ISBN 0-9693056-9-9. \$19.95 paperback.

This publication is the first major comprehensive overview of the Hutterian Brethren society in a generation. In the 1960s and early 1970s a number of excellent discussions of Hutterian life and culture were published (Peters: 1965, Bennett: 1967, Gross: 1965, Hostetler: 1974, Flint: 1975, Ryan: 1977). They were detailed, readable studies.

There have subsequently been publications dealing with specific aspects of Hutterian culture ranging from individual biographies, non-communitarian offshoots, land and legal difficulties, and cookbooks-- to rituals and beliefs, and their historical foundation in central and eastern Europe. A popular summary of Hutterite life has been available for college-level classes since its first edition (Hostetler and Huntington: 1980). One major work (Hostetler: 1974) was republished in paperback form in its original, unrevised form in 1997. However, until this study by Samuel Hofer appeared in 1998, the much-needed updating of an overall summary of Hutterite life had not appeared since the mid-1970s.

There have been a number of important changes within the Hutterite community in the past generation. Computers have become accepted in some colonies for school and business purposes. Highly sophisticated techniques have become widely used in their dairy, egg, meat-curing and hog production systems. The usage of the GPS for farming and the cell telephone for communication between their vehicles has become commonplace. Some Hutterites are now attending college with the encouragement of their colonies. Some communities have their own high schools complete with gymnasiums and TV broadcasting facilities. Other colonies urge their youth to complete high school or to receive a GED. Many families now choose to follow a physician's advice to space the birth

of their children. The differences between the three *Leut* (Lehrerleut, Dariusleut, and Schmiedeleut) have become more than minor issues (such as their clothing styles or the variations in the manner of selecting their ministers).

The author was a participating member of a Lehrerleut colony until his early twenties. Although he no longer is a practicing Hutterite, he writes from the insider's point-of-view. His knowledge of Hutterite life and personal insights make this work a valuable contribution. His ability to see the three groups (*Leut*) as related, but separate entities is a welcome contribution to Hutterite studies. There is a chapter on the "Prarieleut" who are related to the communal Hutterites, but who chose to be independent farmers. Another chapter is concerned with the *Weggelufene* (literally, "runaways")—those people who, like himself, have permanently left the colonies. His personal experiences, and those of others with whom he has had connections make this chapter, perhaps, the most significant of the whole book.

The chapter, "When East Met West," contains a discussion of the issues surrounding the break of the "Western" (traditional) Hutterite groups from the "Eastern" Society of Brothers (also known as the "Bruderhof" or "Woodcrest" group). Hofer also describes the events leading to the current rift within the Schmiedeleut. However, he does not ascribe blame to any group for these events: "...the marriage between the Hutterites and Bruderhofers ended in divorce because of cultural differences that simply could not be overcome" (p. 139).

The concluding chapter, "Frequently Asked Questions and Misconceptions about Hutterites" shows the appreciation the author has for his Hutterian heritage. This chapter could have provided Hofer an outlet to justify his rejection of Hutterite life. However, it is written in a positive mode and is generously sympathetic to the Hutterite point-of-view.

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