Panel Discussion

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by Susan Trollinger, Ira Wagler, Donald Kraybill, and Maria Moss

The Plain People Conference: Anabaptist Roots in North American Landscapes concluded with a lively panel discussion on “The Future of the Plain People.” Panelists (from left to right) Susan Trollinger (University of Dayton, OH), Ira Wagler (author of *Growing Up Amish*) and Donald Kraybill (Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies) discussed with moderator Maria Moss (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg) a wide-range of topics, including the future of Amish communities in the digital age, teaching material on the Amish, organic farming, solar energy, Amish reality TV shows, and the status of Amish women unable to bear children.

Susan Trollinger is Associate Professor of English at the University of Dayton, Ohio, where she teaches courses in writing, rhetorical theory, and visual rhetoric. She is author of the book *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia* which analyzes the visual rhetorics of Amish tourism in three popular tourist towns in the world’s largest Amish settlement. Her most recent book project, which she co-authored with William Vance Trollinger, Jr., is entitled, *Righting America at the Creation Museum*

Ira Wagler grew up in Old Order Amish communities in Canada and the United States. Frustrated with Amish life and the abundance of rules, he first left his family and community at the age of seventeen. Little did he know then that he would return and leave again several times over the course of nearly a decade. Eventually, he began to share stories of his remarkable life with the world in an Internet blog—stories that would form the basis for his *New York Times* bestseller, *Growing Up Amish* (2011). In this important memoir, Wagler tells of his seemingly ‘predetermined’ Amish life as well as his search for identity, freedom, and self-determination. After pursuing an academic career in English literature and law, he has since returned to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where he remains an avid blogger.

Donald B. Kraybill is Senior Fellow Emeritus at the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College, PA. Kraybill received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Temple University. Internationally recognized for his scholarship on Anabaptist groups, he is the author, coauthor, or editor of dozens of professional articles and some twenty books, including his flagship work, *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. His books have been translated into eight different languages and his research has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and several private foundations. A full list of his books appears on his home page. Donald Kraybill’s research and commentary on Amish groups is often featured in magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and online.

Maria Moss received her doctoral degree in one of her life-long passions—Native American Studies—from the University of Hamburg in 1993 and her post-doctoral degree in neo-realist American literature from the Free University Berlin in 2006. She has been teaching North American Studies at Leuphana University Lüneburg since 2007. In addition to numerous publications on Native issues, she has recently branched out into the fields of animal ethics and Critical Animal Studies. The following articles are evidence of her latest interests: “A Whale of a Problem: Indigenous Tradition vs. Ecological Taboo,” “‘Their deaths are not elegant’: Animals in Margaret Atwood’s Writings,” and the forthcoming, “From Within Fur and Feathers: Animals in Native Life and Literature.” Her other fields of teaching and research include creative writing, Canadian Studies, and environmental literature.