Paper:

To "Pray" and Not To "Play"?: The Function of Play on the Maintenance of Culture in the Traditional Christian Life

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This paper discusses the culture maintenance function of playing by observing and studying as an example "the Hutterites," which is a religious minority group trying to stay strict Christians in the contemporary North American society, and by clarifying the reason why playing, which should be basically denied, is accepted in their daily life. Playing is not denied in the strictly disciplined society, based upon a rational interpretation by the people, which regards playing as something that contributes to the enhancement of their religious mind. Even if the pleasure is something that should be denied, it is accepted as long as it serves as materials of confession at the time of baptism and leads to the reproduction of religion, like youthful deviate behavior. Even in their strict Christian life, the Hutterite people do not feel repressed by accepting playing and live a Christian life not passively but rather actively. This paper finds that the acceptance of playing is one of the reasons of the successful maintenance of their culture for more than 450 years.

Keywords: play, faith, maintenance of culture

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1. Introduction

"Pray" and "Play." The difference is only the "r" and the "l," but there is a vast difference in their origins and meanings and it would be difficult to find their commonalities. The word "pray" came from Latin with the original meaning of "demand made to God," or human act intended to God [Lemaitre, Qunson et al. (1998), p.20]. As long as the Christianity is concerned, the physical behavior of "praying" is intended "to make it possible to physically see the invisible God and Saints to whom the prayers are offered up [Schmitt (1996), p.304]. "Prayer" is a symbolic action to show respect to God.

On the other hand, as Huizinga pointed out, the word "play" came from the Anglo-Saxon meaning "to play," but involves various actions, including, "bus-tling actions," "gestures," "clapping," and "playing musical instruments" [Huizinga (1973), pp.95-96]. In the strict Christian religion, "playing" is something that should be denied and excluded due to the image of hedonism and corruption the word accompanies. So the above two words with the only difference of the "r" and the "l," have quite opposite meanings of static and dynamic as well as sacred and worldly behaviors.

Even in the present world, playing is denied in the Hutterites society, in which Christians live a life based strictly on the teachings in the Bible. "Worldly" pleasures such as dancing and playing of musical instruments are prohibited. But then, is there no room for "playing" in such a society? Are chances for enjoying subjectivity and creativity involved in playing excluded on account of religious strictness? Can they conserve their culture if they live in asceticism in a space isolated from outside world?

This paper discusses the above issue based on examples found in a religiously minor Hutterite society in Canada. Past studies of their culture, which has been inherited from the 16th century, focused on their religious strictness, disciplines, norms and education for the internalization of the religion for the maintenance of their culture. Most of the studies took special notice of the peculiarity of the Hutterite society, analyzing it as a strict society bound by disciplines. But the writer noted that they have enjoyments and moderate pleasures to enliven their daily life just like the usual societies and they even encourage humors to make others laugh in their daily living.

Thus, the purpose of this study is how "playing,"

which is the opposite word of "praying" in a Christian society, is accepted in the Hutterite society and what role does it play in that particular society. In short, my conclusion is that "playing" is accepted in the Hutterite society based on a rational interpretation that enables it to fit in the teachings of their religion. The acceptance of playing helps them keep their original culture subjectively and creatively. I would like to demonstrate that "playing" is one of the factors that enable them to keep and maintain the culture of a minority group without causing conflicts with the modern society surrounding them.

This study is based on the fieldwork the writer has been engaged in since 1996. The work started with a preliminary survey conducted in March 1996 followed by surveys in July-September 1996, December 1998-February 1999, August-September 1999, April 2000, July 2000, August 2001, February 2002, and July-August 2002¹.

2. History and Current State of the Hutterites, an Ethnic Group That Keeps on "Praying"

The Hutterites are people who have obstinately kept the strict religious teachings of Christianity since the 16th century in their own communal living. In order to minimize the effects from the outside society, they live a life based on a system of communal ownership, owning and sharing material goods in common in an area for living called "colony" that consists of about 100 members, as a descent group. Their historical background, which has been passed down from generation to generation, is one of the methods that strengthen their solidarity as an ethnic group. Their historical background as an ethnic group up until the present time is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The 1500s were an important transition period for the Christianity. The "Reformation" erupted in various parts of Europe, and Protestants were born. Included in "the Anabaptists"² who were regarded as heretical among the radicals of the protestants at that time were

the Hutterites. The group, named after Jacob Hutter, their then leader, was formed in 1528 and soon persecuted because they were living in a community based on a communal ownership system and conducting adult baptism against the prevailing infant baptism [Sakakibara (1967a), p.85]. They never made a protest against the persecution as they had pacifist faith, and started roaming around Europe. They traveled to Moravia (Present Czech), Hungary, Transylvania, Ukraine and then finally went to North America towards the end of the 19th century. However, as they rejected to go into military service based on their pacifist faith, they met constant prejudice and discrimination. As the neighboring Canada was encouraging immigration, as the country needed people to exploit farmlands, they started moving to Canada on a large scale in 1918. As of 2001, the number of colonies in North America counts more than 450 with a population of more than 50,000 [Hutterite Telephone and Address Book (2001)].

After more than 450 years since its inception as a minority ethnic group called the Hutterites, they are still living a Christian life based on the religious teachings stipulated in "Reichenschaft (Confession of Faith),"³ edited in the 16th century. They wear traditional outfits consisting of a pair of black trousers, a shirt in conservative colors and suspenders for men, and married men are bearded in accordance with what the above literature says. As for women, they look as if they are from the medieval times, wearing a long ankle-length skirt and a polka-dot scarf. They look like symbols of their well-maintained traditional culture. The communal ownership system is still implemented and farming and livestock farming are the main source of the colony's income. The colony provides its members housing, meals and daily necessities. Their language is the unique "Hutterish (Hutterian),"⁴ which is the mixture of Tyrolean German, Russian, and English. "High German" is used for religion, including the Bible and literatures about the teachings as well as for sermons and hymns. Children start going to kin-

1 Surveys conducted after April 2001 were subsidized by research grant (special fellowship grant) from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

2 Wiedertäufer in German. During the 16th Century, as they advocated adult baptism, they were called "Anabaptists" with sarcasm. [Kashiwabara (1967b), pp.4-5]. Other existing Anabaptists include the Amish and the Mennonites.

3 This literature was originally titled "Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith of the Brothers Whom Men call Hutterites (Reichenschaft unserer Religion, Leer und Glaubens von den Brüdern so man die Hutterischen nennt aussgangen)," written by Peter Rideman (1506-1556) during the pioneer days of the Hutterites [Rideman (Sakakibara: translator and author of the foreword) (1977), p.4]. This was later approved as the official written confession of religion of the Hutterites. The literature written in the original language was jointly published by two colonies in Alberta with the title "Reichenschaft: unsrer Religion, Lehre und Glaubens" [Hutterischen Bruder Gemeine (1998)].

4 The daily conversation is spoken in a language that is a complex mixture of Tyrolean dialect, Eastern European languages (present Czech and Hungary), Ukrainian Russian and English. Currently "the Hutterian-English Dictionary [Hoover (1997)] is privately printed and published.

dergarten in the colony at the age of 3. When they are 6, they start attending religious school in the colony in the morning and in the evening. During the daytime they receive general education in English taught by teachers from outside the colony, dispatched by the educational committee of the concerning province.

This study is based mostly on the survey in P Colony (tentative name) located outside the City of Lethbridge, the third largest city in Alberta, Canada. Seventy members (27 males and 43 females) currently live in P colony on a vast land of about 10,000 acres where residential quarters, farms and livestock farms are set up. The members stay mostly inside the colony. The only exceptions are business transactions with outside world, which are done by male members (sales and purchases of crops and livestock), hospitalization and visits to medical institutions, shopping of daily supplies, and visits to other colonies. They keep on "praying" in this modern world, so as to conserve their religion in a place called colony, isolated from the outside world.

3. "Playing" That Hinders "Praying"

Their community life is in accordance with the above mentioned "Rechenschaft" and almost all their daily activities are based on the literature, which stipulates details of living in a communal ownership system, including, clothing, education, the way to greet each other as well as their religious interpretations. Accordingly, the literature is regarded as a constant reference for people to live a religious life.

The literature often describes not only desirable behaviors in a religious life but also behaviors that should be avoided. It is the criteria concerning daily living and about telling from good behaviors to evil behaviors. The criteria roughly divides human acts into two categories, namely "Acts to please the fresh (zur Lust des Fleisches, fleischlichen Lusten, Begierden)" and "Acts to please God (dazu auch angenehem sei vor Gott)". "Acts to please God" literally mean acts to follow the teachings of God, or more concretely, to pray earnestly to God, to sing heartily thinking of God, and to celebrate for God.

On the other hand, acts that should be avoided are described negatively as "acts to please the fresh" or "the works of the fresh." "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissension, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, and revelries" are cited from the Bible [Friedmann (1975), p.103]. However, the acts that should be avoided are

basically, acts based on one's desire caused by "sin (Sunde)" and "Devil, Satan (Teufel)" [Rideman (1977), p.158].

Then to which category does "playing" belong? No clear mention of "playing" is found in their teachings. This is because it indicates concrete acts such as the above. But playing in a broad sense is a "self-indulgent" activity, and as such it is an "act to please the fresh" based on the personal desire. That is to say, playing is something that should be denied as a "sin" or "evil" when seen from the viewpoint of religious sense of value of the Hutterites.

However, in order to avoid a nearsighted conclusion, we should take a look at pleasures and pastimes in their daily life with the criteria in the teachings as a clue. Because plays are interwoven in their daily living to make their culture brilliant and lively.

4. The Rational Interpretation of "Playing" to Convert It into "Praying"

Most of the studies of the Hutterites so far focused on their strict way of living supported by their religious interpretations [Hostetler (1974); Peters (1965), etc.]. When their lives were described, the focus was on the religious service performed almost daily, prayers before 3 daily meals taken by the members altogether under one roof, their daytime cooperative labor, and a thorough education to children.

However, during the survey in which I lived together with them, I found in their intense looks "plays" as well as "prays." What needs to be noted is the meaning of "playing" for them. It is true that "worldly pleasures" are denied in the Hutterite society, as they could lead to "hedonism" and "corruption." Dances, playing of musical instruments, playing cards, and parties are clearly denied [Kraybill and Bowman (2001), p.36]. This is because they are among the "acts to please the fresh" in their teachings, as mentioned above. But no clear definition of "play" is given in the teachings. Therefore, every act that involves "playing" is judged, according to the situations, by referring to the Bible and the teachings in order to determine if it is an act "to please God" or "to please the fresh."

In checking various activities in their daily life based on these two criteria, the personal interpretation plays an important role. This is because if the act falls under the former category, it is considered all right, but if it falls under the latter, then it becomes something that should be denied. In other words, however, if the act is not clearly prohibited in the teachings, then one can interpret it as an act "to please God" and can implement it. In the following paragraphs, plays that are

accepted in the Hutterite society through the shift of interpretation are discussed.

4.1. Leisure Activities for Children

The Hutterite word that have mostly the same meaning as the word "play" is, according to the Hutterian-English Dictionary (See Note 4.), "shpil," which means 1) "play, drama"; 2) A "toys, games, playthings in general [Hoover (1997), p.122]. The word came from the German word "Spiel." From what the writer heard, shpil is used for kids only. The most popular pastime of children is "to play make-believe." Children under and at around 10 years of age ride toy tractors and trucks in the yard, behaving like workers. They play with toys shaped like carpenters' tools. Girls prefer playing house with dolls and toy tableware. They follow examples of their mothers and elder sisters and take good care of doll babies.

These kinds of kids' leisure activities are accepted because they work for the maintenance of their culture. In the Hutterite society, men's roles and women's roles are clearly defined. Men play main roles, engaging mainly in farming and livestock farming as well as becoming preachers, teachers and the colony boss who is in charge of the colony. On the other hand, women take care of general household affairs. Responsible roles for women are the head cook and kindergarten mothers. Children start playing make-believe when they are a little before three years old, or before going to kindergartens. Thus they start learning their culture that clearly separates men's and women's roles from the days of their earliest recollection. They are given "hand-me-down" toys that their elder brothers and sisters used. Their parents intentionally give them toys according to their gender so as to let them learn the division of respective kinds of labors. "Make-believes" by children such as the above are played within an enclosure prepared by adults.

The children start learning rules of daily living in a religious community, including the prayer before each meal as soon as they are born. Between 3 and around 20, which is the age they are baptized, they are given a thorough religious education in the educational institution⁵ set up in the colony. The Hutterite education aims at discouraging children from sticking to their own stubborn will and being driven by lust," [Rideman (1977), p.184] and teaching them to simply obey. Ac-

cordingly, children are not encouraged to think by themselves, but are made to repeat and recite the words in the Bible, the teachings, and the prayers. They do not let the children ask "why." They implant in children religious devotion so that it will say deep in their heart. According to reports from Hostetler and the others, they do not hesitate to give physical punishment to children. It is stated in the teachings that it is for "suppressing people's worldly qualities [Hostetler (1974), p.214]" to "give punishment to children who are stubborn and not obedient [Rideman (1977), p.185]."

This kind of educational method, however, is, from first to last, one-sided teaching by adults to children, or an extremely passive enculturation of children. The leisure activities mentioned above are, although children are playing in the enclosure prepared by adults, the enculturation of children that is active, involving subjective participation of children. This is why these leisure activities are not denied, or rather encouraged.

On the other hand, concerning game of cards and dancing categorized in "acts to please the flesh," a thorough guidance is carried out by adults. But they argue that as children are not baptized yet, and they are "not yet religiously on their own," and as such, it cannot be helped. Such a sin is the result of being possessed by the evil and the child may be forgiven by getting the evil out through guidance by adults. The preacher of P Colony, while weeding in the farm for private use, said to the writer, "You have to weed carefully in order to grow good vegetables. The same can be said about education. We adults have to take the evil out of the children carefully."

Children's leisure activities that teach them their tradition and culture are accepted, but those "to please the flesh" are denied. When they do engage in the latter, it is interpreted as something "unavoidable because they are not yet baptized," and they are given guidance for reform.

4.2. Leisure Activities for Adults

The adult baptism is one of the most important rites of passage of the Hutterites. A Hutterite is accepted as a member of the colony, a religiously "whole person," and socially "full member of community" only after having been baptized. But at the same time, they can no longer be forgiven if they commit a crime after

⁵ Children between 3 and 5 years of age go to kindergarten. Between 6 and 15, they go to German school and English school. Even when they are over 15 years of age, they must attend Sunday school held in the afternoon on Sundays until they are baptized.

baptism. It is natural that leisure activities "to please the fresh" are denied. If such an act is discovered, the person will be temporarily held incommunicado from the life in the community and made to confess before all the other members. Thus, leisure activities "to please the fresh" are self-restrained because they have their obligations as an adult and their activities are socially restricted. However, not all the leisure activities are prohibited. As long as they are acts to please God, they are accepted.

During the survey, the writer sometimes found pleasures that we regard as leisure activities called "shpas." The Hutterite-English dictionary says that "shpas" means "fun, merriment" [Hoover (1997), p.122]. The German word "Spaß," from which the word shpas derives means "joke, banter, clownery, fun, pleasure" ["Spaß" (1985), p.2043]. The most common and frequent leisure activity is gabfests for both men and women. The Hutterite people chitchat almost daily during recess between their labor hours, and during free time in the afternoon. What they talk about differs between men and women. Women mostly talk about meals, clothes, and sometimes about visitors. Men exchange information, talking about things concerning their jobs and events in town. The chat often involves humors. Hostetler, well known for his study of the Hutterites, pointed out their sense of humor [(1974), p.175]. There is no religious restriction on the theme of humor and the cause of laughter, and so they laugh quite often while they chat, or rather a person with a good sense of humor is often favorably regarded in the colony.

Other pastimes women prefer includes, singing, sewing, and knitting. Reading is the most popular pastime for men. Possession of TVs and radios are prohibited in order to avoid direct impacts of "worldly matters." Therefore, men tend to read the Bible, teachings, chronicles⁶, and books about Anabaptists. These activities as a pastime are interpreted as their recreational activities. In the Hutterite society, labors are important as they support their community lifestyle. Leisure activities for adults are opportunities to be temporarily free from the labors and at the same time to switch mood and refresh in order to get ready for another series of labor. They work together so as to maintain a community called colony that is comparable with "the Ark." It is repeatedly written in the teachings

that it is important to carry on the communal living, working together as a group of brothers, in order for them to be obedient to God [Rideman (1977), pp.56-58, p.86, pp.123-131 and other pages]. That is to say, to play for refreshment and diversion that support willingness to labor, which maintains the community, can be interpreted as the "act to please God." By stretching the meaning of playing to accord with their teachings, "playing" can rationally be interpreted as something that goes along with "praying."

5. Reproduction of "Praying" Based on the Denial of "Playing"

As mentioned above, playing by children is accepted, as it serves to teach tradition to children, and playing by adults is accepted, as it is rationally interpreted as the "act to please God," in the Hutterite society. Also it has been indicated that leisure activities that do not go along with their religious values are denied as the "act to please the fresh." However, the period between 15 and around 20 years of age, which is the time when they are baptized, is the most distinctive period of Hutterites and often referred to as "foolish years" or "in-between years," [Hostetler and Huntington (1996), p.82], and youth of these ages often engage in deviant pleasures categorized in the "act to please the fresh." And surprisingly, the adults just acquiesce these pleasures of youth. On what basis do they give silent approval to these kinds of pleasure?

Young people freely and voluntarily engage in fun and games as they desire, as if they are released from the enclosure for children that had been provided by adults. According to reports from Hofer and Hostetler, they date, which they refer to as "diene youg'n (chasing girls)," and "ummrlauf'n (running around)," secretly hold parties among friends in hideaways, go see movies in town without accompanied by adults, and sometimes spend time in bars [Hofer (1998), p.51, Hostetler and Huntington (1996), p.54]. These pleasures, as Hostetler pointed out, are called "lust." "Lust" means "glee, gaiety, liveliness, will, and desire" in the Hutterite-English dictionary [Hoover (1997), p.88]. The German word, from which it originated, means "pleasure, happiness, enjoyment, satisfaction, and merriment" [Lust (1985), p.1340]. "Lust" often appears in

⁶ The chronicle tells the teachings in the Bible and detailed description of incidents from the beginning of the Hutterites to the present day, when the English version [Hutterian Brethren (1987)] was published. The majority of the chronicle is about the difficult days when they were suppressed as being heretical.

teachings, attached with a negative meaning.

The silent acceptance by adults who have educated children strictly suggests that they dare to have the youth engage in pleasures that the adults deny. The reason is that the young people are in a stage just before the baptism, which is the important rite of passage to grow into adults. This particular baptism is a religiously and socially essential ceremonial as well as the reason why they are called "a sect of Anabaptists." When baptized, the youth are socially and religiously recognized as formal members of the community and religiously "whole persons." After the baptizing they must not engage in the "act to please the flesh." When such an act is revealed, sanction will follow. Before the baptizing, youths make confession of all the previous sins to the preacher, and the baptizing will purify all of the sins, and they will be reborn as "spiritual man." [Hostetler and Huntington (1996), p.84]. The adults let the youth play positively on their own without a word, make them feel guilty and let them confess the sins before the baptizing. By going through the process of purification through confession and made reborn through the baptizing, they are encouraged to reflect on themselves and deepen religious devotion. Fun and games of youth before baptism, who are leaders of the next generation, work for the reproduction of religion. Unfaltering religion serves as the basis for the Hutterite tradition for many years to come.

6. Conclusion

In the Hutterite society, pleasures are not denied and rejected as "sin." As long as they work for the conservation of the Hutterite culture, they are accepted as "acts to please God." On the other hand, fun and games in adolescence, which are "acts to please the flesh," are accepted silently in order to encourage self-reflection of youths, as the pleasures serve as materials of confession of sins right before the baptism. Young people are baptized and purified of sins and religiously reborn as "spiritual man." That is to say, playing becomes meaningful by being denied. Fun and games of young people are accepted silently and serve to reproduce religion.

The Hutterite people live a life based on the Bible and its teachings in a limited living space, isolated from outside world. This environment tends to give pressure upon people living in there. By interpreting and accepting pleasures in accordance with religious values and standards, the Hutterite people live a strict Christian life not passively but actively, involving

themselves in the maintenance of their life style and culture. "Pray" and "play," the two major words in the title of this paper, are essentially two sides of the same coin, inextricably linked like the Mobius strip, because the people positively involve themselves in the maintenance of their society and culture based on "praying" through "playing."

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