

Comptes rendus

Karl A. Peter, *The Dynamics of Hutterite Society: An Analytical Approach*

ROBERT B. KLYMASZ

Karl A. Peter. *The Dynamics of Hutterite Society: An Analytical Approach*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1987, xxiii + 232 pp., 13 tables, notes, bibliography. Cloth \$27.50, ISBN 0-88864-108-7. Paper \$16.95, ISBN 0-88864-109-5.

There are perhaps 20,000 Hutterites in Canada today. Over the years they have attracted only limited probing by social scientists who tend to find other minorities more pressingly problematic. After all, what could possibly go wrong in a culture that focusses on "the knowledge of God, the suppression of man's carnal nature and the acquisition of faith" (p. 90)? Karl Peter's book penetrates this veneer with such know-how that the reader suspects that this sociologist is a native son with firsthand knowledge of life among the Hutterites. The monograph indeed represents something of a personal odyssey marked by twenty-five years of study. The bulk of the work is a compilation of Peter's article-length publications, some of them dating back to the 1960s. Thirteen "chapters" are arranged under five main headings, as follows: "Religion and history," "Social relations and social structures," "Demographic dynamics," "Contemporary social changes" and "Ethnic relations." Acutely attuned to the variables that have shaped the Hutterite experience, Peter is always aware of ambiguity, inconsistency, dysfunction, paradox, plain luck and "historical accidents" (p. 23). Occasionally this awareness surfaces as disaffection for the Hutterites' "religious imagery or mythology which . . . prevents . . . critical mental processes" (p. 69). Elsewhere Peter is filially concerned over "the adaptive changes that Hutterites must make in the near future to maintain their internal cohesion" (p. 134). His true strengths, however, lie in a profound sensitivity to the intricacies of his subject matter, in his dual insider/outside

approach and in his disciplined forays into history, theology, economics, statistics, genetics, biology and even neurology. His insight into the subtleties of culture change are perhaps best reflected in chapter 12 on the changing role of Hutterite women and the pressures produced by individual, family and communal concerns.

In general, Peter is at his best when exploring the contemporary situation with its signs of individualization, religious defection (chapter 3), anti-Hutterite sentiments—"an ethnic struggle over scarce resources" (p. 221)—and preachers who "are perceived more as secular business leaders than spiritual shepherds" (p. 50). He mentions (without supporting references) "the death of two young men indicted into the U.S. army and dying as a result of torture while refusing military service" (p. 214) and occasionally becomes preachy: "A sober reflection on how this sect has been treated in the past should teach us a number of valuable lessons about ourselves, our motives, and our behaviour" (p. 223). Material culture is peripheral to Peter's concerns although not totally ignored (on page 223, for instance, he laments the "unfortunate loss of material culture").

To sum up, Peter's book gives an important, up-to-date overview of the Hutterite experience and its many crucial aspects. For any studies on Hutterite material culture in Canada, the work provides indispensable background information. The author is not slavish to the theoretical formulations of earlier sociologists but uses his own findings to develop considerations that are directly relevant. The work's only irritations are editorial in nature. Repetitious moments, for instance, seem to remain (in spite of avowed efforts to eradicate these); the bibliography should have listed the late Gabrielle Roy's

descriptive account of her visit among the Hutterites in Manitoba in the early forties. And, finally, an index, a German glossary and

photo-illustrations could have enhanced the book's value considerably.

Provincial Museum of Alberta, "Seasons of Celebration: Ritual in Eastern Christian Culture"

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Provincial Museum of Alberta, "Seasons of Celebration: Ritual in Eastern Christian Culture."

CURATOR: David J. Goa.

DESIGNER: Paul Beier.

Travelling Exhibition, cross-Canada itinerary, 12 November 1986 to 30 April 1989.

Accompanying monograph, David J. Goa, *Seasons of Celebration: Ritual in Eastern Christian Culture/ Temps de célébration: Les Rites dans la culture chrétienne d'Orient* (Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1986), vi + 56 pp., ill. Paper \$14.95, ISBN 0-919411-44-4.

"Seasons of Celebration" is a travelling exhibition produced by the Provincial Museum of Alberta in Edmonton and scheduled to show

in at least thirteen centres from Newfoundland to British Columbia over a period of about three years. In addition to recognizing the observance of 1988 as the millennium year of Christianity in the Ukraine, "Seasons" also seeks to provide a comprehensive "glimpse into the marvelous world of Eastern Christian culture" (p. vi in the monograph), including such variants as Greek, Russian, Coptic, and the Mar Thoma tradition from Kerala, India. As such, this exhibit constitutes an ambitious and pioneering effort. Its intent is laudable. However, in its attempt to translate this into practice and, moreover, to focus on the living tradition as found in Canada (a tradition "which stretches back to the time of Christ and



Fig. 1

Display facilities for "Seasons of Celebration" included arches, archways and moveable islands constructed in the shape of natural signs as used in musical notation. (All photographs were taken by Robert B. Klymasz and are provided here courtesy of the Canadian Museum of Civilization.)

