

BOOK REVIEWS

FAITH, POLITICS, AND POWER: THE POLITICS OF FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES. By Rebecca Sager. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. xiii + 249 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

President George W. Bush announced his signature domestic policy of faith-based initiatives immediately after taking office in 2001. Claiming that, because of their sectarian character, churches providing social services suffered discrimination in the competition for federal funds, Bush asserted that faith-based social welfare programs could provide better, more effective social services to addicts, the needy, and the poor, and should therefore receive federal funding. To launch his policy, the president established a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) under the leadership of John DiIulio. During his first two years in office, Bush failed to get congressional approval for FBIs, and so he implemented his preferred policy through executive orders and bureaucratic innovation.

Much has been written about the vicissitudes of the Bush FBI policy at the federal level. However, this book is the first systematic effort to examine what happened to the president's signature policy at the state level. Bush's FBI policy, a legacy from his single term as Governor of Texas, went with him to the White House as part of his agenda of "compassionate conservatism." Rebecca Sager examines how this policy translated to the individual states, beginning with its initial success and then stagnation in Texas itself.

Sager's method is three-fold. She interviewed, first, the faith-based liaisons, individuals selected by a governor to launch the policy within a state. Second, she compiled data on the legislation enacted within each state to make it easier for churches and religious groups to compete for taxpayer funding of social service programs. Finally, she engaged in extensive field research, observing the implementation of faith-based initiatives in a considerable number of states. Such first-hand observation allowed her to evaluate another method used by states to implement the FBI policy—namely, the use

of faith-based conferences to share information with religious networks about funding opportunities, guidelines, and regulations.

These three methods enabled her to compile a rich database of information about *how* and *why* states implemented faith-based initiatives. The result is a comprehensive study, rich in empirical data, about the actual practice of FBIs at the state level. To make sense of the data, Sager uses social movement theory and especially the political science literature on symbolic politics to understand how and why this policy, so poorly funded at both federal and state levels, has taken hold in some 41 states. Briefly, Sager argues that while Bush's faith-based initiatives failed to help the needy because of insufficient funding, the policy itself has been successful in reconfiguring the boundaries of church-state relations in the United States. Faith-based programs offered an important *symbolic* victory to evangelical supporters of the Republican Party partly because these programs legitimated the goals of the evangelical movement. In addition to evangelicals, however, the policy attracted other advocates, who had different reasons for supporting the policy.

What were these reasons? The various constituencies that supported FBI included those who wanted to help the needy; those who wanted churches and religious groups to be included in the public square; those with purely political motives who saw faith-based initiatives as a way to attract new voters, especially African Americans, to the Republican Party; and fiscal conservatives who preferred less government and saw the initiatives as providing an inexpensive alternative to government-sponsored social services. Proponents of *deseccularization*, *devolution*, *privatization*, and *fiscal conservatism* all advocated FBIs in the states. This policy enabled them to support religion and the churches without having to fund costly new public policies. All they had to do was to appoint a faith-based coordinator and enact legislation that would recognize and legitimize religious supporters of faith-based initiatives. In other words, this was a public policy that fit almost perfectly with the ideology of the Republican Party. As Sager writes, "faith-based policy implementation was a result of multiple

constituencies: the believers, the fiscally concerned, and conservative political ideologues” (p. 13).

Sager shows that, despite good intentions, faith-based initiatives were not aimed at helping the poor, but rather at expanding the reach of the Republican Party and changing the culture of how religious groups are treated in the public square. Instead of constitutional separation of church and state, FBI policy encourages accommodation and cooperation between church and state.

She writes that even the Bush administration claims for the policy were overstated, noting that supporters of FBI resorted to fiction, not fact. Some of the most crucial assumptions behind the policy were never verified. For example, faith-based groups have not been excluded from the social services sector; some of them (e.g., Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, and Jewish Family Services) have long been providing much-needed services for which they have received substantial public funding. Further, there is no evidence that religious groups were ever discriminated against. Nor is there any evidence that faith-based organizations are uniformly better at providing social services. Yet these claims were all part of the narrative supporting the policy.

From her study of state implementation, Sager concludes that FBI policy failed in its primary objective of helping the poor, for several reasons. First, there was no new funding. Second, obtaining what limited funding there is requires navigating the bureaucratic requirements of government grants and audits, a daunting process that is simply beyond the capacity of many small churches and FBOs. Finally, faith-based groups are far from being able to take over responsibility for the poor from the government. “In the end, small churches and religious groups are primarily in the business of ministering to their flock—not of running day-care centers, drug rehabilitation programs, and prisoner reentry offices” (p. 189).

If the Bush policy has not achieved its primary goal of providing social services to the needy, it has achieved other secondary goals. At the level of political rhetoric and symbolic pol-

itics, the policy has been very successful, principally in reframing church-state relations, and legitimating the evangelical social movements from which the policy originally emerged. As Sager notes: “Their symbolic value alone is so great that the faith-based initiatives have flourished without the nourishment of funding” (p. 190).

As for the future, Sager thinks FBI is here to stay. She notes that during the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama proposed a faith-based program that actually does what was promised to help the poor and needy, rather than merely being a symbol that serves to gain votes. Since taking office, Obama has made good on some of his promises. He created the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and broadened its advisory council to include leaders from diverse religious groups. However, despite his promise to do so, he has not rescinded the hiring provision established by President Bush that allowed faith-based groups to hire only co-religionists even while receiving government funds. This has disappointed many who see this hiring provision as an egregious breach of church-state separation. In addition, some criticize Obama’s outreach to moderate and conservative evangelical leaders on his advisory board, claiming that Obama’s FBI is just as political as Bush’s (the only difference is the object of political wooing—black voters for Bush, evangelicals for Obama). Ironically, Obama appears to be continuing to use the initiative as a symbolic political tool. However, given the national turn to intense fiscal restraint, whether he can provide necessary new funding is questionable.

This is an impressive book in its meticulous research, rigorous methodology, and theoretical sophistication. Despite a few very minor errors (for example, New Jersey’s faith-based initiative was housed in the Department of Community Relations for the first 11 years of its existence and was only placed under the aegis of the Lieutenant Governor after New Jersey elected its first-ever Lieutenant Governor in 2009), these do not detract from the excellence of this book. With the Obama administration developing its own faith-based initiative, Sager’s study holds timely lessons for policy-makers.

Her illuminating analysis of state-level implementation is a substantial contribution to our understanding of faith-based initiatives and contemporary church-state relations in the United States.

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RANKING FAITHS: RELIGIOUS STRATIFICATION IN AMERICA. By James D. Davidson and Ralph E. Pyle. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011. ix+219 pp. \$49.95 cloth.

The principle that the more things change, the more they stay the same finds an apt application in Davidson and Pyle's *Ranking Faiths*. Their work spurs further scholarly interest in exploring the complex historical and contemporary links between religion and forms of stratification/inequalities in American society. While some of the historical data will be familiar to readers, other aspects of the analysis are quite new at least in the way the data are summarized and presented. Herein lays the main strength of their book. Much of the history of how religious affiliations provide the means for perpetuating various forms of power and privilege in the United States has been forgotten, glossed over, and generally discounted as having any relevance for understanding the religious landscape today. The authors make a point of detailing the standard reasons given by social scientists for not focusing their attention more often on religion and inequality, especially the inequalities of social class. The answers Davidson and Pyle report hearing (that religious affiliation is not as significant for the allocation of social resources, that religion is not important to public life as it was in the past, etc.) all reinforce the disconnect among contemporary social scientists that religion still plays a significant role in how power and privilege are distributed in contemporary society. For this last point alone, this book makes a tremendous contribution to the literature.

The analysis is centered around three questions: How did religious stratification develop in the colonial period? What factors have main-

tained the religious stratification structure with groups like Episcopalians and Presbyterians in the upper stratum and others like Baptists in the lower strata over U.S. history? and What has been the impact of this stratification on the stability of American society as a whole? As one expects from a sociological rather than a purely historical answer, Davidson and Pyle chose to adapt Donald Noel's 1968 work on ethnic stratification to their study of religion. In reframing Noel's theoretical model, they argue that religious stratification developed as the combined result of existing religious prejudice, religious competition, and differences in religious groups' social power. As a result of power differentials between religious groups, laws, customs, and ideologies were put in place that contributed not only to the stability of this stratification system but also to changes in it.

Davidson and Pyle conclude by linking the level of religious stratification during different historical periods with the level of social instability in society. The book proceeds by applying the theoretical factors from Noel's work in each chapter, taking the reader from the Colonial period, during which the origins of religious stratification are examined to the contemporary moment, across 223 years where the data they examine illustrate the complex ways that the rankings of religious groups and their differential access to various kinds of social resources becomes the basis for demonstrating the continuity and transformation of American religious stratification up to the present day.

In addition to fascinating anecdotes from different periods that illustrate the history of religious prejudice, such as Colonial Presbyterians who would rather go to hell than to hear a Baptist preach in order to get to heaven (p. 45) and the later battles of the Anglo-Protestant Establishment to retain its access to power in the face of the waves of immigrant Catholics and Jews flooding the nation's industrial cities, Davidson and Pyle provide concise and useful tables that both summarize their narratives and the trends in their data. In these tables, readers will find summaries of the legal status of religious groups in the Colonial period, the religious affiliations of Speakers of the House of Representatives, the Cabinet, and the Supreme Court, presidents of elite universities over time,

the value of church property, and more. Here too readers are reminded of how strong the ties between religious affiliation and access to social power and privilege have been in American history.

The theoretical challenge, not so much a weakness, in this book will likely remain its overall approach for some readers. There is something akin to the “chicken and egg” problem when discussing whether religious affiliation is the independent or a dependent variable in the relationship to stratification. The authors acknowledge that one of the problems other researchers have with their approach is that they would argue that religious affiliation itself is a product of differential power and resource distribution, not the other way around. I would typically be one of these others but the fact remains that both approaches are correct and the causal influences take place in two stages. In the first stage, class positions (and other structural characteristics, like race) shape the patterns of religious affiliation, which in turn, in the second stage, as this analysis shows, continues to perpetuate differential power and privilege.

One of the things that undermine these authors’ analysis is the lack of recognition that the first causal relationship is already in place shaping the second. One might assume from only looking at the second stage in this model that being an 18th-century Episcopalian in Philadelphia for instance happened by chance without any recognition that the colonists imported pre-existing class (and racial) structures and cultures with them from England and elsewhere. That Quakers were dominant in one place and Episcopalians in another speaks to a pre-existing class and power differential and desire of some groups for greater access to resources, which influenced the regions where different religious groups immigrated. These imported class structures in turn set up the historical narrative that they then provide here. The same is true today. Americans are born into and then socialized into different class cultures that *include religious affiliation* but are not caused by it as such. But this comes back to conflicts in scholarly assumptions, not a problem with their analysis as such.

As I began this book, I did wonder who the authors saw as their target audience. I was

caught off guard by the somewhat pedantic discussions of functionalism and conflict theory as if this was an introductory sociology text. Neo-Marxist theories of class power and theories of culture and cultural capital have shaped how social scientists are thinking about religion and stratification now. It is especially odd that little theoretical space was made for insights from these theoretical sources given that the authors implicitly and explicitly are dealing with *cultural* issues in much of this analysis.

As someone who takes seriously the relationship between religion and social inequalities, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It contains a wealth of information that has continued relevance for our own day. These authors are to be commended for providing this excellent historical analysis of religious stratification.

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AMERICAN GRACE: HOW RELIGION DIVIDES AND UNITES US. By Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell with the assistance of Shaylyn Romney Garrett. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. 673 pp. \$30.00 cloth.

In *American Grace*, Putnam and Campbell argue that the structure of the U.S. religious economy and its interaction with historical forces accounts for what they identify as the puzzle of American religious life: the coexistence of religious devotion and diversity and the relative absence of religious conflict. Their basic argument rests on what they call religious “churn,” which resulted from the major social upheaval of the 1960s and its aftershocks along with the unique structure of the American religious economy (i.e., the separation of church and state and the resulting religious pluralistic landscape). This combination of factors and events has resulted in a situation in which most people are socially connected to people from other religious groups. This connection, they explain, has led to an increase in religious tolerance and a lowering of negative, out-group prejudices. They offer two examples of how this might work: “Aunt Susan” and “my friend

Al.” Aunt Susan typifies the family member or friend who exemplifies the idea of a saint; however, she belongs to a different religious group. In this case, via one’s connection to Aunt Susan and the recognition of her moral virtues one realizes that surely Aunt Susan is going to heaven, this grace is then extended to all members of that group. My friend Al represents a social connection that is made on the basis on some nonreligious affinity (work, hobbies, etc.), whom one then finds out belongs to a religious group towards which one has negative feelings. Through friendship with Al these feelings are reduced, and over time this grace is extended to members of all religious groups.

As a social scientist who studies religion, I think everyone needs to read this book. Many are touting it as the new bible on American religion, and rightly so. It is being read by everyone: the people in your life who do not really understand what it is you do will read this and ask you about it, reviewers for journals—including generalist journals—will read it and will expect your assertions to fit with Putnam and Campbell’s descriptions and analysis of the groups, characteristics, and trends of the American religious landscape. The hardcover version even looks kind of like a bible, and the text has structural similarities to a bible—teaching chapters loaded with information interspersed with narrative chapters.

The narrative chapters (by Shaylyn Romney Garrett) are compellingly written and provide a portrait of American religious life that is interesting on its own. Throughout the book, Putnam and Campbell provide superb discussions on a range of topics in American religion. The section on religious change, for example, offers a clear and thoughtful account of religious change in a way that links macro-historical forces to micro-individual choice. There are many other interesting findings, for instance, the fact that religious participation does not substitute for other types of social engagement but actually promotes it is especially noteworthy. Finally, the analysis and discussion of the relationship between religion and ethnicity was a highlight of the book for me. But whether one is interested in interfaith marriage, religious switching, how broader social

changes such as women’s movements or increasing economic inequality has impacted religion (or in turn been dealt with by religion) you will find it in this volume. This book offers an informative synthesis across a range of topics and religious research that is based on carefully crafted research. All of the substantive and social scientific topics addressed by the authors are well referenced and packaged in a manner that is accessible to the general reader.

As a fan of public scholarship I also appreciate the fact that writing as an academic for a general audience has its own set of unique challenges; however, I think that a few academic readers might be disappointed with some aspects of the presentation of the intellectual provenance of the topics discussed in the book. As an example, the authors specifically mention the three Bs (belief, belonging, and behaving) and the importance of taking into account religious tradition but make no mention of Smidt, Kellstadt, Guth, and Green’s lifetime of work on these measures. They present their findings concerning Americans’ surprisingly high rate of willingness to believe that people outside of their religious tradition will go to heaven without noting Rodney Stark’s (2008) presentation of the same findings based on the Baylor Religion Survey. Additionally, scholars familiar with the writings of Simmel and Blau will recognize the similarity between the causal argument Putnam and Campbell make for why social connections increase tolerance and Blau’s theory of how cross-cutting social circles promote intergroup relationships.

These issues aside I think this work will ultimately be extremely beneficial for our field of study. It is bridging the gap between scholarship on religion and the reading public, which will hopefully promote broader interest in scholarship on religion. Additionally, religion scholars may well benefit from the actual data that Putnam and Campbell were able to gather. If made publicly available, this panel study focused on religion would help to fill a major hole in our current data archives.

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A HISTORY OF ISLAM IN AMERICA: FROM THE NEW WORLD TO THE NEW WORLD ORDER. By Kambiz GhaneaBassiri. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. x + 446 pp. \$90.00 cloth, \$27.99 paper.

What do qualitative research, legal testimony, and sunlight shot through stained glass have in common? All of these benefit from, even demand, insider perspectives. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri is an American Muslim, a two-time Harvard graduate, and a Reed College Professor of Religion and Humanities supplying a historian's insider account of Muslim and non-Muslim interaction in *A History of Islam in America*. Here he provides a macrocosmic complement to his microcosmic *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States: A Study of Los Angeles* (1997).

GhaneaBassiri offers *A History of Islam in America* as a relational-oriented history of Muslim and non-Muslim American "encounters and exchanges" (p. 8). His 10 chapters including an introduction and epilogue are primarily chronological with 20 pictures or other illustrations, plus 43 pages of bibliography.

GhaneaBassiri criticizes the "binary opposition" of "Islam and the West" (pp. 4–5) as needlessly dichotomous by setting a religion over against a loosely defined geopolitical construct. Instead of seeing Americans and Muslims as opposing Montagues and Capulets, GhaneaBassiri sees a dance with periods and points of contact, separation, and synergy where participant identities intertwine and at other times are inadvertently, purposefully, or artificially forced apart.

The first chapters survey Muslim presence from the beginning of the American colonial period through the Civil War. GhaneaBassiri differs in his emphasis with Baylor University historian Thomas S. Kidd in *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (2009) and others by focusing on "living Muslims," rather than "literary and political images of Islam" (p. 13). GhaneaBassiri's examples include multiracial or "liminal" communities embodying varying degrees of syncretism between Islam and Christianity, as well as Muslim slaves from North and West Africa.

Some of these African Muslims both slave and free ostensibly converted to Christianity. Others held Muslim identities quietly or nominally. Still others presented themselves candidly as Muslims, trying to dissociate from Christian African Americans and "negroid stereotypes." One freed African slave, Abdul Rahman, garnered the attention of President John Quincy Adams and Secretary of State Henry Clay, and may have pragmatically converted to Christianity to orchestrate his travel, political activism, and return to Africa. Yet Rahman exemplifies the black Muslim dissociative trend by claiming, "not a drop of negro blood runs in . . . [my] veins" (p. 22). Beyond the Civil War and into the 20th century, Muslim African Americans often presented themselves as Turks, Arabs, or "Moors," and were sometimes perceived as such by European Americans describing them as "semi-civilized" compared to (other) African or Christian blacks.

GhaneaBassiri paints the post-Civil War era as facilitating shifts in American Muslim ethnic and national origins, with 60,000 immigrating to the United States from Anatolia, the Levant, Eastern Europe, and South Asia in 1900–1920 to seek employment and support their families back home; as well as to flee oppression, war, and political persecution. As with non-Muslim immigrants, Muslims banded together in ethnic or national enclaves, living communally and frugally to maximize savings for their distant families. GhaneaBassiri graphs statistics for thousands of these immigrants who regularly repatriated after World War I. Esoteric Sufism, sometimes explicitly extricated from Islam and incorporating Indian mysticism and "Theosophy," also gained traction following the Civil War through musical-gurus like Inayat Khan and the Royal Musicians of Hindustan. The predominantly Protestant inaugural "Parliament of World Religions" in Chicago (1893) additionally afforded a forum for Muslims like the rare white American convert Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb to contend for Islam as a truly universal, uniquely true, and superiorly progressive religion above and beyond all others.

GhaneaBassiri reports that this idealizing of Islam continued into the 20th century with indigenous Black Muslim nationalist

movements: the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam, in spite of their frustration with non-American Muslims treating them as subservient, and Louis Farrakhan later complaining, "I see racism in the Muslim world, clean it up!" (p. 290). In contrast, Arab, Eastern European, and other light-skinned Muslim and Hindu immigrants sought with limited success to legally and socially identify as racially dominant "whites." For them, Islam was subsidiary to skin color or nationality. At the same time, Masons and largely light-skinned Shriners appropriated Islamic symbols and rituals to augment an air of "Oriental" mystique for their fellowships and to cultivate exotic Eastern personas.

GhaneaBassiri's insider perspective is palpable when he examines late 20th- and early 21st-century Muslim American activism. He asserts this activism indicates an increasing willingness by Muslim Americans to take part in the American political process by vigorously influencing and contributing to the vital functioning of American society. But he also challenges groups representing Muslims to better reflect American Muslims' ideological and ethnic diversity. GhaneaBassiri sees Muslim advocacy organizations as excessively swayed by foreign interests privileging political Islamist voices and "Puritanical" readings of the Qur'an and Hadith. He cites funding sources, petrodollars, and founders or leaders affiliated with or shaped by Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood and Jama'at-i Islami as underwriting this disparity and potentially aggravating discrimination against Muslims and dissatisfactory relationships with the American government. I only have one minor quibble. GhaneaBassiri appears to vaguely reference partisan sources regarding discrimination. He ought to also (or instead) cite official or more quantifiable data, critiquing where applicable. That said, I believe GhaneaBassiri modestly pens not *The History of Islam in America*, but *A History of Islam in America* splendidly.

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EMPIRE OF SACRIFICE: THE RELIGIOUS ORIGINS OF AMERICAN VIOLENCE. By Jon Pahl. New York and London: New York University Press, 2010. xiv + 257 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

Jon Pahl's examination of the roots of violence in America covers a wide sweep of U.S. history, from the conquest of native peoples to the war in Iraq. Using a variety of sources, Pahl maintains that American history "is riddled with patterns of religious violence" (p. 2), and argues that Americans routinely justify "blessed brutalities" in patterns of "innocent domination." Because the perpetrators of this systemic violence lack malice they believe they are innocent as they make sacrifices for the good of the nation. Yet these sacrifices have real victims who must suffer in order to alleviate actual or imaginary problems. Arguing against Catherine Albanese's claim in *America: Religions and Religion* (1999) that dominance and innocence are two sides of the same phenomenon (1999), Pahl asserts that "at the center of American religious history is sacrifice, as both rhetoric and practice" (p. 5).

Pahl begins by providing definitions of religion, violence, and sacrifice that support his argument. He broadly defines violence to encompass not only individual acts of aggression but also "social and linguistic systems of exclusion and collective coercion, degradation, or destruction of property, persons, and the environment" (p. 15). He defines religion in equally broad terms, and turns to classifications from Bruce Lincoln, Mircea Eliade, Clifford Geertz, and Thomas Tweed. He finds the ideas of compression, or condensation, and displacement (Eliade and Geertz), or dwelling and crossing (Tweed), especially helpful, although he uses Lincoln's four-part linguistic-cultural definition throughout the book as well. Pahl's flexible definitions of religion and violence allow him to consider many cultural products as religious, and he himself confesses the heuristic nature of these labels.

Empire of Sacrifice both depends and expands upon the important works on religious violence by René Girard, R. Scott Appleby, and Mark Juergensmeyer. The author says that traditional analyses of religious violence have

focused on its manifestations outside the United States, and that useful insights have not adequately been applied to religion inside the United States. He uses Regina Schwartz's critique of monotheism to show that wherever nationalism occurs religion is secularized and the nation is sanctified. This move makes the nation innocent of whatever violence it perpetrates. We can see this violence both in the nation and in the markets, a point that Pahl argues in an earlier work, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces* (2003).

This extended introduction to the book is necessary because the persuasiveness of the case studies that follow depend upon acceptance of the author's definitions and presuppositions. Specific examples detail past and present violence against youth, African Americans, women, and victims of capital punishment.

The opening discussion of violence against young people, as exemplified in motion pictures, is the weakest part of the book, in my opinion. Pahl catalogues the mayhem and massacres enacted upon youth in various horror films, such as *Scream* and *Hostel*, and concludes that "the visible violation of youth on the screen has normalized the 'sacrifice' of young people" (p. 61). While that is undoubtedly true, the real-world violence children face in public schools—the "savage inequalities," described by Jonathan Kozol—coupled with historical instances of violence such as the military draft during the Vietnam War or the hidden world of battered children seem equally important, though perhaps not as helpful to the argument for blessed brutalities. Moreover, as Pahl observes, splatter movies may actually undermine the national politics of sacrifice with their over-the-top violence.

While the religious justification for violence perpetrated against women and African slaves is well documented elsewhere, Pahl brings new and provocative insights to these analyses. He uses the slave narratives by Frederick Douglass and Jarena Lee to show how the Christian emphasis on the soul allows good Christians to ignore the damages done to the body. In the discussion of women, Pahl relies upon the diary of Abigail Bailey to analyze the ways in which Christianity was both op-

pressive and liberative for battered women in the period of the Early Republic. These examples, as well as an intriguing comparison of the film version of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* with the Defense of Marriage Act, are compelling examples of the blessed brutalities perpetrated with religious approval that Pahl wants to highlight.

The chapter on capital punishment, titled "Sacrificing Humans," considers the ways in which executions in America are "surrounded with discourses and rituals that mark [them] as human sacrifice" (p. 166). Pahl contrasts the executions of Quakers such as Mary Dyer in colonial New England, with the justifications provided by the executioners. These and other human sacrifices are cloaked in a religious language that masks their historical reality. The pattern of sacrificing a single human being in order to preserve the purity or faithfulness of the community was repeated again and again in U.S. history, according to Pahl.

The book concludes with an epilogue on the global war on terror, in which the author notes the rhetoric of innocence that surrounded the U.S. invasion of Iraq. From prayers to speeches, to the blessing of torture in the language of "mission," the war in Iraq was seen as a sacred calling by the George W. Bush administration. The paradox of "innocent domination" that requires the sacrifice of American and other lives in pursuit of freedom and democracy is clearly in evidence.

The opening sentence of the book asserts that: "This book is an experiment." A few pages later, the author says that he is writing a "post-modern history" (p. 7). These are fair and accurate characterizations of this complex text, which ranges far and wide in order to drive home the point that religious violence is intrinsic to American history, though not to the American sense of self. Pahl admits that though there are forms of religion that legitimize or produce systemic violence, there are also other forms that resist and prevent it. Indeed, an examination of "a coming religious peace" that Pahl plans to write will serve as a sequel to the present book.

Empire of Sacrifice is a thought-provoking work, sure to join other scholarly considerations of religious violence. The 42 pages of

endnotes and the 28-page bibliography provide a valuable guide to research into the topic. While not for undergraduates, the book will assist anyone interested in learning more about the religious roots of contemporary violence in American national policies. The concepts of innocent domination and blessed brutalities are also helpful, and will continue to be useful terms in future assessments of religious violence, both at home and abroad.

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WHAT IS A PERSON? RETHINKING HUMANITY, SOCIAL LIFE, AND THE MORAL GOOD FROM THE PERSON UP. By Christian Smith. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010. x + 544 pp. \$40.00 cloth.

This book represents a merger of two streams of Christian Smith's theoretical work, personalism and its implications for morality, and critical realism with a critique of much of contemporary sociology. Both fit with Smith's long-term project of developing a social science that is neither positivist nor postmodernist yet adds to our collective understanding of how the world works. Smith's new book *What is a Person?* has broad implications for theory and methods in sociology and the role of morality, personhood, and philosophy in the social sciences in general.

The main thrust of Smith's argument, and one of the most valuable insights in the book, is that social scientists need to pay closer attention to their models of humanity and how humanity functions. Without clearly explicating our models of humanity, we can work from potentially absurd or unrealistic foundations to ungrounded conclusions. Smith's book spells out what he believes a person is, the criteria to judge models of humanity, the implications of his arguments for morality, and the construction and maintenance of social structure.

To define personhood, Smith lists 30 different qualities that are either unique to humans or present to a greater degree in humans than in animals. From these attributes emerge both the unity of the human mind and the distinct

"person." Many readers might take issue with Smith's argument that our personhood possesses and is *defined* by an inherent *purpose* to sustain and develop "our incommunicable selves in loving relationships with other personal selves and the nonpersonal world" (p. 75). Smith posits that our being is more or less directed towards the ultimate goal of sustaining ourselves, which requires existing in loving relationships with the personal and nonpersonal world. If a model of personhood were to lack objective purpose, Smith argues we are necessarily reduced to relativism and a complete breakdown of science. For purposes to matter to us or to even have them at all, we *need* them to be objective, rather than just agreed and/or relied upon.

I question if the term "purpose" is really the best here, given that Smith has highlighted a possible functional necessity. Perhaps instead one could argue for a *tendency* towards survival parsimoniously explained by evolution. The distinction between the words tendency and purpose is important to the core of Smith's argument, and is the basis of two concerns: Does asking for purpose mean that purpose has to be found? And can the question be usefully answered? That is to say, would it be appropriate to ask "What is the purpose of red?" Smith maintains that we cannot fully explain or understand human life without a concept of purpose. Yet I wonder if purpose is a particularly useful or coherent way of thinking about what it is to be a person given that we can also think of human tendencies without the potential problems of looking for purpose. I believe that this work eloquently demonstrates humanity's need for a belief in a purpose, but does not effectively argue for the existence or necessity of an objective purpose for social scientific research.

The book's second section addresses alternative perspectives on personhood and ontology found in radical social constructionism, network structuralism, and variable-oriented sociology. In each case, Smith focuses on theories of the self using tools taken from anti-reductionist phenomenology and retroduction. He argues that if these theorists *really* believed that the self was scattered and de-centered, an assemblage of relations, or just an assortment of variables, they would not write with the

expectation of having a rational discussion on the subject. Smith writes that “we ought to reject . . . social science conceptions and theories that may predict some observed empirical associations, but that we could not fit into the actual living of our lives” (p. 109). Instead of prediction, social scientists’ goal should be “to understand and explain causally what is real and how and why it operates or acts as it does” (p. 110). Whatever the predictive power of these models, he suggests that we should reject them because they do not at all fit with life as we live it. I suspect readers from many research traditions will have much to say regarding these arguments, especially on the relationship between predictions and realism.

The final section expands on the implications of his argument for the development and maintenance of social structure, morality, and the value of human life. Smith uses his model of personhood in the beginning of the section to great effect and this is perhaps the most direct and best-written chapter of the book. Smith’s view on social structure is intriguing, offering explanations for both change and stability in social structure using interlocking material, embodied, cultural, social, cognitive, and historical processes that could be of potential use to many researchers working in inequality, social change, and social control. Though I am curious, if Smith’s model of social structure requires a teleology, is “purpose” necessary here?

It is the moral implications of Smith’s position, highlighted in the final chapters, that I believe will greatly trouble some readers. After dubbing our nonmaterial, embodied personhood a *soul*, Smith argues that persons have a unique emergent quality—*dignity*. Dignity is the quality of importance and worth in another human being. This concept is important to Smith’s argument because if one of the 30 qualities from which personhood emerges were to fail then personhood would also fail, but “dignity” counters this possibility in an interesting fashion. It occupies the unique position of being an emergent *brute fact*, yet it is not dependent upon the material and nonmaterial entities that interact to form dignity; in his words it is proactively rather than responsively emergent. That is to say, an emergent being is moving toward being expressed in full, therefore is

present before its components are totally developed or if some of them fail. This maintains “personhood” status for entities that have lost one or more of their 30 qualities, such as people with dementia, the profoundly brain-damaged, or human embryos. Even if parts of the person fail or are not fully developed, dignity exists.

I suspect many will question if this is morally and philosophically sound. If the being is fully present before its components, then why is it not present after they are gone—especially if someone believes in bodily resurrection (p. 275)? How is awareness of dignity different from (or more useful than) empathizing, a neurologically based but socially defined phenomenon? Finally, morally speaking, this model places human personhood and dignity at both conception and the center of moral discourse, which invites a deluge of disagreement.

Whatever one’s perspective on the myriad of philosophical and moral issues involved, I believe *What is a Person?* will inspire a rigorous and fruitful debate on emerging movements of critical realism and personalism within the social sciences.

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PARANORMAL AMERICA: GHOST ENCOUNTERS, UFO SIGHTINGS, BIG-FOOT HUNTS, AND OTHER CURIOSITIES IN RELIGION AND CULTURE. By Christopher D. Bader, F. Carson Mencken, and Joseph O. Baker. New York and London: New York University Press, 2010. 272 pp. \$70.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.

As the authors of this volume note, the quality of much survey-based research in the field of paranormal belief is generally a bit poor. Researchers typically need to make what use they can of inadequate questions drawn from general social surveys, or else, they use custom-designed (though not always fortuitous) survey instruments handed out to convenience samples (often undergraduate students). The research reported in *Paranormal America* has benefited substantially from the capacity to field a survey

of their own design, with numerous questions about paranormal belief and practice, and to ask these questions of a representative population. The use of high-quality data from a U.S. national survey (the Baylor Religion Survey) puts the findings reported here on much more solid ground than is usually the case.

Paranormal beliefs are not uncommon in American society. Of the nine beliefs that the authors included in their survey (Atlantis, ghosts, psychic powers, fortune telling, astrology, communication with the dead, haunted houses, UFOs, and monsters like Big Foot) only 32 percent of the population believe in none of them. Although only 2 percent report believing in all of them, 35 percent report believing in at least three items from the list. Drawing on arguments from the study of crime and deviance, the authors make a good case that those with greater stakes in conformity (as indicated by education and income) will believe in fewer items on the list. If someone is thereby strongly committed to convention, they will tend to opt for conventional beliefs and practices (including traditional religious belief and practice) and shy away from nontraditional beliefs and practices (such as the paranormal), which are socially marginal. The authors argue, furthermore, that those who believe in particular paranormal phenomena may be considerably different from those who are firmly committed to it, and make it an integral part of their lifestyle. Thus, while paranormal beliefs are relatively prevalent, the true believers are much less so, and they can be very different than the casual believers who may respond affirmatively on surveys, but these beliefs may make little difference to their lives.

The book provides solid evidence on a number of topics about paranormal belief and practice that have been much debated by social scientists. Thus, the authors find that marginalized people do tend to gravitate towards *some* paranormal beliefs and practices, particularly those that may give them a greater sense of control over their lives (like astrology and psychic powers) as well as ghosts; other paranormal beliefs and experiences (like UFO sightings) are more the province of the better educated and more affluent (though calling these “élites,” as the authors do, seems a rather big leap). It is not especially surprising that those with literal-

ist views of the Bible take the dimmest view of paranormal belief and practice, but it is a new discovery that the relationship between church attendance and paranormal belief is curvilinear, with infrequent attendees being more prone to such beliefs than either frequent or nonattendees.

The book covers the list of topics that is a diverse, if not contentious, grouping, not least amongst the very people studied in this book. As one would expect, the glossolalia speaking Pentecostals take a rather dim view of astrology, but the Sasquatch hunters also do not think much of the UFO abductees (or their sanity). “David,” one of the Big Foot researchers (an NRA supporting, Republican conservative Protestant bank manager) is “rankled by” the authors’ view that belief in Bigfoot is an aspect of the paranormal (p. 157). Indeed, the fascinating account of Big Foot hunters really suggests that they have far more in common with (at least as an ideal to which they aspire) zoologists who are looking for a species that they are convinced exists (about which the majority is not convinced) than with astrologers. What the Sasquatch researchers are looking for is incontrovertible evidence, of the kind that will convince the most skeptical scientists without need for faith or interpretation. They may be wrong about the existence of the elusive primates, but they seem to be rather hard-nosed in the way that they pursue them. The final substantive chapter deals with conservative Protestants who believe in the existence of (but do not participate in) Satanic rituals and Pentecostals who speak in tongues. These beliefs may (or may not) be equally distant from the mainstream (at least as university-based academics see it), but one does wonder why they are discussed in a book on the paranormal.

Having published a number of solid peer-reviewed journal articles on the topics presented here, the authors are clearly reaching out to a broader audience with this book, presumably the “intelligent general reader” who publishers find as enticing (and perhaps as elusive) as the Sasquatch. As a result, methodology is relegated to an appendix, which will probably be a frustration for specialist readers. The field reports are written in an engaging style that makes for frequently entertaining, and

occasionally enlightening, reading. Some areas will probably strike many professional social scientists as superficial, and even a bit glib as ethnography. The theoretical contribution of the book is likewise a bit thin; the authors attempt to engage with theoretical concerns sometimes falls short, as in their attempt to use economic models to explain why conservatives are resistant to belief in the paranormal. This is explained in terms of a solution to the free-rider problem; it seems far more likely, at least to this reviewer, that “evangelicals do not simply believe the paranormal is an ‘economic threat’ but a threat to the soul” (p. 90).

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GOD’S BATTALIONS: THE CASE FOR THE CRUSADES. By Rodney Stark. New York: HarperOne, 2009. 276 pp. \$24.99 cloth, \$15.00 paper.

The Crusades took place over 700 years ago, but for Rodney Stark they remain a significant historical problem. The “prevailing wisdom” among commentators on the Crusades, as Stark finds it, is that these were waged against the Islamic East to seize treasure and colonies. Countering this view, Stark reviews Crusade history in *God’s Battalions* and shows that the Crusades were not offensive attacks but defensive operations. Stark’s thesis is explicit: “The Crusades were precipitated by Islamic provocations: by centuries of bloody attempts to colonize the West and by sudden new attacks on Christian pilgrims and holy places” (p. 8).

To support this claim, Stark utilizes existing conclusions of dedicated historians. In fairness, it must be noted that Stark is clear about his intention of only making a particular argument about this history accessible to a general audience. Stark has long been a leading sociologist of religion, and he is not so easily excused for how *God’s Battalions* falls short of making much of a theoretical contribution to comparative-historical sociology generally or to the sociology of religion. There may be little that is original as far as history in *God’s*

Battalions apart from the way it is presented, and sociologically, this work is disappointingly ideographic. Nonetheless, *God’s Battalions* is an informative primer in Crusade history, and Stark’s detailed presentation does suggest sociological questions for future exploration.

The Crusades were inaugurated in November 1095 C.E. with Pope Urban II’s call for the rescue of Jerusalem from its Muslim occupiers. This is a convenient moment for marking the start of the era, but in Stark’s broader view, the history of the Crusades begins four centuries earlier with the rise of Islam. This new religion united formerly warring Arab tribes into a virulent army that would capture the Middle East and North Africa within decades and establish a Muslim domain on the Iberian Peninsula. The advance of Islam eroded the Byzantine Empire and was poised at Europe’s frontiers. By describing this situation, Stark shows that the Crusades were not spontaneously launched out of the imagination and ambition of western Europeans; they were responses to threats that persisted over centuries. The second chapter of *God’s Battalions*, entitled “Christendom Strikes Back,” is a history of Christian armies retaking Italy and Sicily and much of Spain, and here Stark assesses Europe’s military might. While Muslims still held territory, Europe dominated the Mediterranean, and repeated Muslim defeats on land bolstered confidence for a farther-reaching Crusade to the Holy Land. Thus, the Crusades were not events isolated in an era of their own; rather, they are understood in the longer narrative of *God’s Battalions* as part of a grander historical trajectory.

European victories over Muslim armies were based on an advanced and extensive material infrastructure, both military and economic, and in *God’s Battalions* the elements of this are catalogued. The material base of the West was made up of harnesses for horses, horseshoes, wagon wheels, swiveling axels, moldboard plows, and the practice of crop rotation. This agricultural technology assured that the crusader was better fed, healthier, stronger, and on average a bigger man. The same horses and wagons Europeans used in agriculture were put to effective use on military expeditions, and for battle, they specifically developed chain

mail, new ship designs, and high-backed saddles with stirrups that enabled a rider to thrust a lance while remaining stable on his mount. Stark takes this extensive inventory to dispel popular images of this period as being the "Dark Ages"—a time when progress is assumed to have been eclipsed by ignorance. Therefore, the Crusades, according to Stark, can no longer be looked upon as the despoiling of Islamic civilization by an inferior but brutal culture. While Christian Europe technologically advanced, it was the Muslim world that failed to develop in its retroversion towards antiquities and classical learning. Whether this was because of the intellectual orientation of the Islamic religion *per se* is debatable. Even in Europe, the Christian church banned the crossbow as "hateful to God." Yet, crusaders got around the church's prohibition, and crossbows in the hands of Godfrey of Bouillon and his men were decisive in the taking of Jerusalem in 1099 C.E.

There is a tension in *God's Battalions* between the material forces of the Crusades and the religious ideas that Stark believes inspired them. This contradiction between material and ideal facts is not so much a problem as it generates additional questions. Wresting Jerusalem from Muslim rule was the goal of the First Crusade, and all of the following Crusades centered on this Holy City. The significance of this place in the Christian tradition is obvious, and beyond this Stark explores the phenomenology of how Jerusalem came to be experienced as a place bestowing remission of sins on the penitent who would make the arduous pilgrimage there. Hence, when assaults on Christian pilgrims by Muslim raiders and Turkish rulers became more severe, not only were Europeans subjected to bodily injury and death, but Europe was being cut off from the means of atonement. The same nobles and knights whose brutal lives put them in most need of pardon for sins of wrath marched forth to commit further acts of violence to reopen the way for their redemption. Pope Urban II's assurance that the military capture of Jerusalem would lead to salvation synthesized the use of violence with all other Christian teachings. This theological moment appears to have made the Crusades unique in the history of warfare. At

the same time, Stark situates the Crusades in a centuries-long history of conflict between Muslims and Christians in that the objective was nothing other than Europe's reclamation of lost territory. The contradiction here is simply that crusades that ostensibly were thoroughly religious are also presented as continuations of a string of battles that had primarily secular aims. Situated on the historical trajectory on which Stark locates them, the Crusades appear not so much as the particular defense of the Christian religion but more so as a phase in the general defense of Western civilization. Stark need not have taken a firm stance on one side of the materialist-idealist dichotomy, but the balance between material and ideal-religious elements and interests in the Crusades remain to be found. The impetus behind the Crusades may indeed have been the repulsion of Muslim encroachments, as Stark argues, and not Europe's expansionist program of conquest. Either way, religion alone may not have been the preponderating force in the Crusades, and on this point, Stark does not prove otherwise. If religion was not the primary element, the question arises as to how much religion must weigh into a conflict for it to qualify by some definition as a true "crusade" or "holy war" (see Bainton 1960).

Rodney Stark has in the body of his earlier writing extensively developed a rational-choice theory of religion, but nowhere in *God's Battalions* does he state his long-standing assumption of rationality. With a close reading of *God's Battalions*, however, Stark's recognition of the calculation of costs and benefits in human action does come through at certain points. Stark understands the situation Richard the Lionhearted was facing when he decided to leave Jerusalem to Saladin at the end of the Third Crusade in 1192 C.E. Jerusalem, even if taken, would have been left vulnerable after Richard's return to England, and the costs of its continued defense or a temporary victory were both too much to bear—this, in spite of the city's religious significance. Meanwhile, those at home in Europe called for yet more crusading, largely to keep hold of investments in a region where centuries' worth of costs in both money and lives had already been sunk. Ultimately, cost calculations would end the era

as crusading became prohibitively expensive to a population bearing its burden in greater taxes.

Additionally, Stark considers how the death of King Louis IX in an aborted crusade to Egypt in 1270 C.E. must have been felt in France, and it seems as though the crusading spirit could not be allowed to claim any more of Europe's best talents. The discussion here is an elaboration of Stark's material in more deliberately chosen rational-choice terms; these are not explicated by Stark himself. To Stark's credit nonetheless, it is his other work on rational-choice theory and religion (e.g., Stark 2001; Stark and Bainbridge 1996) that provides for the best interpretation of these parts of *God's Battalions*. Rational choice may not necessarily be a preferable paradigm, but it is a strategy for ordering history (Kiser and Hechter 1998) that could have given a more consistent and bolder theoretical structure to Stark's narrative and made for a more powerful contribution to history and sociology.

God's Battalions makes a convincing case that the Crusades were responses ultimately to Islamic provocations. This, however, is simply raw material for the social theorist, and *God's Battalions* will be disappointing to the sociologist seeking an example of a generalizable approach to history or some broader explanation of religion and war. A popular audience will not see the problem of finding the balance between material and ideal forces in a phenomenon. Material factors seem to have weighed most heavily, in a very rational sense, in ending the Crusades, and at their start, the spiritual benefits of opening the way to Jerusalem may be

recognized as equally rational motives. Stark does describe how religion was harnessed to violence in the Crusades, but in presenting this linkage as a unique feat of medieval theology, he avoids the problem of how religion so often seems to have an elective affinity with extreme violence. Stark especially sidesteps this issue as he presents the Crusades as continuations of Europe's earlier military defense. The reason is that this minimizes the significance of religion in the Crusades as events purportedly unique in their religious mission. *God's Battalions* is a lucid history for a lay audience. It can nonetheless become more than this for the reader who is prepared and willing to do the extra work of questioning and looking more deeply into Stark's text.

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