

seders, each providing a reinterpretation of the Exodus. Christians too reinvented themselves over and over with the aid of the Bible, and appropriated the Jewish Bible (e.g., placing Jesus on the Exodus) just as Jews earlier had appropriated Hellenistic stories (making Moses inspire ancient philosophers). Muslims carried on this practice. Throw in as markers, on one end, the Bible, containing texts that (re)invented Hebrew traditions, and, on the other, modern biblical scholars, who gain legitimacy through their own inventive imaginations. Then add to this mix other ways of religious self-aggrandizement (e.g., King Herod's frenetic building program; Muslim architecture and Christian cathedrals throughout the Middle Ages) and you have a fundamental set of questions addressing the human need to feel important, at times even superior. "The human condition is not created anew every generation," Gruen reminds us in an earlier publication (*Why Remember?* 1973:15); his present study contributes challenging new data from early Jewish writers on *la condition humaine*.

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Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice. Edited By David D. Hall. Princeton University Press, 1997. 253 pages. \$52.50 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

This collection of ten essays gathers together some of the finest scholars of American religion to approach diverse subjects in that wide field from the perspective of practice. *Lived Religion* is postmodern in the sense that it seems to have several beginnings. David Hall's introduction and Robert Orsi's essay both give overviews of the essays to follow. Meanwhile, Danièle Hervieu-Léger's chapter on the Catholic charismatic renewal in France serves as a fine place to begin this collection since the central insight of the volume as a whole derives from an earlier French awareness that the "lived religion" of human beings was far more complex than the earlier scholars' obsession over "religious observation" that reduced being religious to a matter of frequency with which subjects performed normative acts and practices prescribed by the religious establishment. The first question of many scholars has been: "How well do they (the religious masses) conform to the norm (of official religious institutions)?" This leaves aside the striking question of whose religion is it anyway?

The authors are united by their determination to read more than the texts of elites. But *Lived Religion in America* is about more than celebrating the religious practices of the people over against the strictures of religious authorities. Indeed, words like "tensile," "hybridity," "multivalent," and "ambiguity" leap off the page to push against a more fundamental erroneous assumption shared by religion's adherents and its interpreters alike, namely, the assumption that religion is, by definition, functional, always working to bind things up, bring out the best in people, and make things work out for the greater good. When religion dis-

appoints either of these groups, it is usually labeled, in one way or another, as not being "real" religion. For the authors in this book, however, what is religious is not over-determined by any such moral concerns. Having discarded the need to preserve a high doctrine of religiousness, they are strikingly free to see new things in American religion. Marie Griffith shows how women's identity and autonomy can be promoted within the highly patriarchal assumptions of Women's Aglow Fellowship. Stephen Prothero writes about how supposedly progressive, scientifically minded advocates of cremation in the nineteenth century could, nevertheless, share a religious experience while watching one of their fellow advocates being cremated. Leigh Eric Schmidt is able to redeem the experience of giving and receiving mass market produced holiday cards from the dismissal of cultural critics, recognizing that these devices serve as vehicles for expression of values and emotions that are deeply personal, even talismanic, in significance for those who use them. Cheryl Forbes demonstrates that there is more to Mrs. Cowper's 1925 devotional classic *Streams in the Desert* than has been supposed, partly because of its ability to put together what is not in a formal theological sense supposed to fit together.

In an account of his own efforts to bring popular piety into the classroom for examination Robert Orsi shows how elite assumptions about religion infect even undergraduate religious studies students at a state university. For these students, religion is about the sacred, the formal rites of religion; it is emphatically not about urban shrines and popular devotions. Orsi even hints that other scholars of American religion, who consider their work to be a long way from the church history of a half a century ago, are more wedded to elite constructs than they will readily admit. For them, the theologians do theology; lay people do popular piety. Not so for Orsi. For Orsi, everyone does theology: "Theologies are not made in a single venue only—in the streets or in the churches, at shrines or in people's living rooms; it would be unfortunate if the turn to lived religion meant simply changing the valence of the familiar dualities while preserving them, just substituting religious practices in the streets and workplaces for what goes on in churches" (9).

A book such as this that makes an argument for the hybridity of religion almost needs to be a collection, for single author narratives are troped to provide a resolution that the authors of *Lived Religion* teach us is not to be expected of life or religion. Historically those religions that do not function to ameliorate social disagreement are reclassified as "pseudo-religious" so as to preserve the construct of a religion as being a definitionally beneficial entity. By contrast, here we have the possibility that real religion may divide just as easily as it may heal. The promise here is heuristic: that religion, thus described, fits better the facts of American religion than do the tangled definitions into which scholars have forced facts. Here, then, we have an account of religion where people do not behave as they are supposed to behave but religiously behave as they do, nonetheless.

Not every popular religious practice contributes to human flourishing. Some prove quite complicit in sustaining structures that alienate and dominate individuals and groups. Some of the authors in this collection are more attuned to

these patterns than others. The best of the essays give readers some sense of how religious practices, institutions, and sources like the Bible contain what Danièle Hervieu-Léger calls a "surplus of meaning." Religious practice thus understood, therefore, simultaneously opens up some human options and forecloses others. Thus, in Anne Brown's and David Hall's contribution family religion and Puritan beliefs about the covenant between God and elect believers struggled for control in the practice of baptism and the Lord's supper in early New England. The result was that often people did (and did not do) churchly things for reasons that were decidedly not ecclesially encouraged.

One problem with this volume it is that the authors must break unfamiliar theoretical ground and use new theory to do history simultaneously. The effect is that the narrative is often muddled by jargon that seeks to carry the theoretical freight for the case studies. At the same time, the authors all resist normative judgments about how good their subjects and their respective religions are. This is good—for these subjects would be too easy targets for those with various axes to grind. The authors have eschewed scholarly objectivity in the sense that they are willing to credit the possibility that people might be like them. Curiously, this renders the portrayal of their subjects more sympathetic, more subject-centered. They jettison, therefore, not the historical quality but rather the smug superiority of many historians who use the advantage of life and intellect to savage the dead and the common man and woman. Instead, these authors strive to understand those about whom they write.

About one half of the essays deepen our participant-observer data; the balance recover their evidence from varied historical sources. Noteworthy of the former type are essays by Nancy Ammerman on "Golden Rule Christians" (her characterization of the practiced faith of the American mainstream) and Michael McNally's account of the ways in which the singing of Christian hymns among the Ojibwa of northern Minnesota produce somewhat different contemporary results than those intended by the nineteenth-century missionaries who instituted the practice.

This is a good volume for those scholars who have come to believe that American religion was the boring stuff of denominational mergers and ecumenical statements. This volume eloquently proves that that religion is dead, if it ever existed as more than an elite construct. Furthermore this book shows the plasticity of even the mostly familiar religions of Christianity in its domestic forms. For scholars outside the field of American religion, the theoretical issues are explored in a worthwhile manner.

The first twenty-seven pages of the book are as important as anything written in the field in a generation. The essays that follow are of substantial quality and will interest to varying degrees people outside the sub-fields of the particular authors, particularly around questions of gender devotional practices. Moreover, they serve as a wonderful introduction to some of the most exciting questions on which historians and sociologists of American religion are at work today.

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