

BOOK REVIEWS

MORAL AMBITION: MOBILIZATION AND SOCIAL OUTREACH IN EVANGELICAL MEGACHURCHES. By Omri Elisha. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011. xii + 263 pp. \$60.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

EMERGING EVANGELICALS: FAITH, MODERNITY, AND THE DESIRE FOR AUTHENTICITY. By James S. Bielo. New York: New York University Press, 2011. xii + 225 pp. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

American evangelicalism is always changing. It adapts to social context and positions itself against its own past. Yet in the contemporary mind, “evangelicalism” is too often seen as a movement frozen in time. It connotes the “culture wars” issues and strategies of the 1980s and little more. To be sure, conservative evangelicals who fit this image still routinely make the headlines. But restricting our view to these activists obscures the diversity of evangelicalism today. This diversity can be seen in the move among many evangelicals to expand their social consciousness beyond the issues prescribed by yesteryear’s Christian Right.

Two excellent new books chart these waters. Both are multisite ethnographies conducted by anthropologists of Christianity. Taken together, the books cover the ecclesiastical spectrum of evangelical organization—suburban megachurches on one end and the house church movement on the other. Given these divergent foci, the common themes found among the books’ protagonists are striking. Central among them is a critique of mainstream evangelicalism—its inward focus, therapeutic ethos, and disregard for social outreach to the disadvantaged. Tied up with this critique is a search for more authentic religious expression, a commitment to place and relational stability, alternative notions of eschatology and God’s kingdom, and sustained engagement with “the city,” encompassing issues such as community development, homelessness, poverty reduction, and race relations.

Omri Elisha’s *Moral Ambition: Mobilization and Social Outreach in Evangelical Megachurches* is based on 16 months of fieldwork at two megachurches in Knoxville, Tennessee at the turn of the millennium. This was a period of bipartisan consensus on the importance of faith-based social service provision. In national discourse, churches were placed front and center in the fight against poverty. The book focuses on a few dozen socially engaged evangelicals (or “activists”) at each church who wanted to spur their congregations toward greater social outreach and engagement in the Knoxville area, focusing especially on the largely African-American inner city. With a few exceptions, these outreach efforts were relatively moderate fare along the antipoverty spectrum, what Elisha calls “organized benevolence.” Yet the activists encountered uphill battles to get leaders and fellow parishioners to look beyond ministry within their own church walls. Tellingly, the book’s title refers to “ambition” rather than “consequences” or “success.” The main story here concerns the ambition to expand social outreach and the challenges and tensions within evangelicalism that the church activists encountered.

The megachurches didn’t advertise social outreach among their many ministries, and Elisha found a distinct lack of organizational vehicles through which members could engage on issues such as hunger, poverty, and community development. Yet there was growing interest in social outreach at both churches. This interest was especially prominent at the demographically and organizationally younger church, which drew a more “hip” crowd. At both churches, activists viewed social outreach as an antidote to consumerism and complacency, or what Elisha eloquently discusses as the “spiritual injuries of class.” Activists also worried that established church practices inadvertently reproduced patterns of power and privilege. Greater social engagement was viewed as an indicator of a maturing faith. Interest in social engagement was also fed by a broader focus on spiritual and social revival within the city. A nagging sense that Knoxville had an indeterminate sense of place underlay a yearning for transformation in the region. Among evangelical leaders of a variety

of stripes, the inner city emerged as a locus of spiritual transformation because of concerns that Christian unity within the metro area was foundering upon the shoals of racial alienation.

The ambition for social engagement manifested itself in different ways, ranging from outreach by single individuals to formal partnerships between churches. Some activists helped out needy individuals on their own, such as the church member who provided sustained assistance to a drug-abusing single mother she met at a homeless shelter. Other parishioners participated in, and in several instances founded, Christian nonprofits and other types of faith-based organizations to serve the underprivileged. Still others participated in reform efforts, such as those to reform local schools. The most large-scale undertaking was an organizational partnership between one of the megachurches and a new inner-city black church led by a charismatic pastor with a strong vision for community redevelopment. The megachurch provided substantial financial resources for a new church building and for the social outreach programs promoted by the black church, such as the construction of mixed-income residential housing. The two churches also hosted a series of public workshops on interracial reconciliation and conducted occasional joint worship services. The joint community development project received civic awards and the broader Knoxville populace defined it as a success.

Too often, however, outreach efforts failed to gain much traction at the megachurches, and even those that did were fraught with challenges and internal tensions. Lack of time, or at least the perception of it, was a significant obstacle. Affluent suburbanites felt like they had no extra time to devote to social outreach between their existing commitments to work and family. Political ideology was another obstacle. In a culture permeated by political conservatism, attempts to raise consciousness about the poor, the inner city, and racial “others” didn’t resonate. Gendered assumptions posed a further challenge. Because expressions of compassion were coded as feminine, it was particularly difficult to pull men into social engagement.

Beyond describing such obstacles, Elisha is at his best when he plumbs some of the deeper

theological and cultural tensions that beset outreach efforts. Key among these was the tension between compassion, which is rooted in unconditional benevolence, and accountability, which imposes expectations and obligations on the recipient of benevolence. Dispositional expectations of accountability continually hamstring well-intentioned outreach, and these expectations were enmeshed in two powerful genres of nostalgia. “Apostolic nostalgia” was a yearning for the types of rich social relations, such as those based on mutuality, which characterized the early Christian church. Yet evangelicals, when they did engage in social ministry, were all too likely to “drop in and drop off” in poor communities without nurturing the types of relationships that foster sentiments of mutuality for either party involved. Evangelicals sought accountability without the reciprocity of ongoing relationships, and when they didn’t observe the accountability they expected, their commitment to engagement weakened. “Nationalistic nostalgia” was based on an idealized American past characterized by independence, responsibility, and hard work. Evangelicals sought to inculcate values and standards through social welfare efforts for the sake of national renewal, irrespective of their fit with the needs of disadvantaged individuals and communities. These internal aspects of white evangelical subculture often limited the success of socially engaged evangelicals in the suburbs, despite their good intentions.

These aspects of megachurch culture represent part of what the Emerging church movement has defined itself against. James Bielo’s sympathetic portrait, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*, provides the best scholarly mapping of this movement so far in print. “Emerging evangelicalism” arose in the mid-1990s as a loose network of individuals, conferences, and books oriented by a shared critique of mainstream conservative evangelicalism. The people associated with the movement are largely white, middleclass, well educated, and under 40 years old, and most “deconverted” from more conservative evangelical, fundamentalist or Pentecostal traditions. Bielo cites figures that there are more than 700 Emerging congregations in the United States, which is likely an

underestimate, given the porous boundaries of the movement. His ethnography is based on three years of fieldwork (2007–2010) among Emerging evangelicals in Lansing, Michigan and the southwestern corridor of Ohio connecting Dayton and Cincinnati.

Bielo adeptly explores how the Emerging movement has been dually shaped by its response to conservative evangelicalism and by broader social conditions. Though Emergent leaders emphasize their positive vision of Christian worship and living, this vision is clearly positioned against the evangelical mainstream. In response to evangelicalism's philosophical modernism, Emergent evangelicals exhibit suspicion toward epistemological certainty. In response to mainstream evangelism practices, Emerging evangelicals cultivate relationships in place of overt proselytization. In response to megachurches and the church growth movement, the movement emphasizes church planting and often makes house churches the center of worship. In response to liturgical practices oriented by the oratorical sermon, Emerging evangelicals embrace "ancient-future" practices such as closer observation of the liturgical calendar, multi-sensory spiritual practices, and monastic discipline. In response to mainstream evangelical commitments to a narrow range of social issues, Emerging evangelicals are more progressive in their social concerns, focusing on issues such as the environment, poverty, health, trade, housing, and peace.

The contours of the Emerging movement can also be understood as a response to broader societal trends, what Bielo describes as the conditions of late modernity. (This helps explain why Emerging groups have formed within mainline Protestant denominations as well as within evangelicalism.) An overriding theme that emerges from Bielo's fieldwork is the desire among Emerging evangelicals for religious lives that are more authentic. This desire stems from a gnawing sense of alienation and estrangement. Complaints circulate about life lived within bureaucratic structures and communities of relative strangers, about symbols and signifiers without real referents. So Emerging evangelicals seek to reestablish a sense of place by moving to urban neighborhoods with

vital histories. They take vows of stability—the promise to remain where they live for the rest of their lives, to foster thick networks of social relations, and to incorporate, via geographical proximity, racial and socioeconomic "others" into their lives. They seek lives of simplicity in the face of the consumer capitalist ethos.

These social practices fit hand in glove with being "missional." Participants in the Emerging movement nowadays rarely use the term "emerging" as a self-description. Instead, and with great unanimity, they describe their goal as to be missional—to be a missionary in one's own society. This means acculturating to the local environment, cultivating relationships, fostering trust, and, in the process, serving and witnessing to others. It is an orientation based on sustained presence. Being missional manifests itself in a variety of ways. Some Emerging evangelicals get involved in existing outreach programs in their local areas, such as soup kitchens or food pantries. Others establish new institutions. This includes churches and outreach centers, but also includes ventures that do not seem to be manifestly "religious." One group, for instance, opened an urban coffee house to serve as a public space for bridging the social distance between nearby college students and a local underprivileged community.

One longstanding view within the scholarship on 20th-century American Protestantism is that evangelical prohibitions against social activism on justice issues flow from their premillennial eschatology. Evangelicals believe that society is irredeemable until Christ's Second Coming; therefore, social reform can only be in vain. Although strong claims based on this type of simple theological determinism can fairly be viewed with skepticism, it is nevertheless striking that Emerging evangelicals subscribe to a different eschatological framework altogether. Usually referred to as "kingdom theology," it provides a doctrinal basis for this-worldly social activism by exhorting evangelicals to act in ways that prefigure the perfection that is yet to come. This "already, not yet" formulation of God's kingdom provides the theological warrant for the Emerging movement's critique of mainstream evangelicalism and for its missional embeddedness in local communities.

It is tempting to read these two compelling ethnographies with a temporal ordering that not only parallels the authors' respective periods in the field, but follows a linear subcultural evolution. Elisha captured incipient trends toward social engagement within the archetypical evangelical organizational form of the 1990s, the suburban megachurch. Bielo documents an evangelical zeitgeist in recent years, the rise of the house church movement and its attendant kingdom theology. Only time will tell how extensively the ethos of the Emerging movement will penetrate the core of evangelical culture, but some of the broader dynamics revealed in each author's fieldwork are worth noting.

Though formal politics was not central to either author's analysis, each provided evidence that social engagement does not translate into political liberalism. At the megachurches, Elisha found that engaged evangelicals exhibited deeply felt concerns for the poor and disadvantaged, and that a minority further recognized sources of systemic injustice. Yet consonant with their "nationalistic nostalgia," they did not see the state as playing a legitimate role in the solution. Rather, they emphasized the essential role played by voluntary outreach and civic associations in advancing the cause of justice. These sentiments aligned comfortably with their political conservatism rather than challenging it. Bielo described the younger evangelicals he studied as progressive on what could be termed "justice" issues. Yet due in part to their theological influences, this seems to translate into partisan dealignment, rather than realignment with political liberalism. Furthermore, many Emerging evangelicals, like their megachurch counterparts, adhere to a conservative gender ideology that locates women primarily in the domestic sphere. This view is deeply at odds with contemporary liberalism, even if many other Emerging ideological commitments are in closer alignment.

In both the megachurch and Emerging church contexts, evangelical social outreach confronts challenges posed by privilege and a legacy of certitude. Suburban evangelicals exhibited a "missionary mentality" that risked re-

producing the asymmetrical power dynamics between megachurch members and the urban communities they sought to serve. The most socially engaged evangelicals at the churches were well aware of this risk, yet they still often succumbed to it to varying degrees. Elisha's account depicts scenes of well-intentioned suburban evangelicals failing to recognize the radical posture of humility and mutuality that, in their more reflective movements, some recognized as necessary for effective urban ministry. The Emerging movement's commitment to place, stability, and relationships is intended to overcome such shortcomings, and in many ways it seems to succeed. Yet in a telling passage in his book (a passage that also adopts the book's most critical stance), Bielo confronts a number of evangelicals with the claim, taken from a noted evangelical speaker, that white evangelicals who undertake urban missions without nonwhite mentors to guide them are essentially colonialists. Responses to this criticism varied, but a number of Bielo's respondents proudly claimed historical continuity with foreign missionaries of yore—missionaries who, critics might claim, imposed their views on a poorly understood "other."

Bielo suspects that the "Emerging" label will recede as a descriptor and that "missional" will likely take its place in the evangelical lexicon. What seems equally likely is that the growing diversity within evangelicalism will continue apace, both as a consequence of the passing of the "New Christian Right" generation and because of the waning influence of mainline Protestantism and its institutional home for many justice concerns. Just how deeply these changes penetrate the social consciousness of mainstream evangelicalism, and how extensively they influence the dynamics of civic life and American politics, remain open questions. But as both of these books strongly suggest, they are important questions that scholars should keep their eyes on.

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WORSHIP ACROSS THE RACIAL DIVIDE: RELIGIOUS MUSIC AND THE MULTIRACIAL CONGREGATION. By Gerardo Marti. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. xiii + 266 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

Over the last decade, investigations of multiracial congregations have become an increasingly important and expanding focus in the social scientific study of religion. This area of inquiry has developed to the point where there are competing interpretations of what these churches represent, what counts as “multiracial,” and even differences over the terminology used to represent the congregations being studied, whether they are (or should be referred to as) “multiethnic,” “multiracial,” “multicultural,” or something else. In addition to the theoretical implications underlying these differences, there is as well a primary conflict in theoretical interpretation between scholars who understand multiracial congregations as transcending racial/ethnic divides, replacing these with a common religious identity, and those who maintain that these congregations often fail as racially egalitarian religious communities, and thus are not truly multiracial. Gerardo Marti has been a strong proponent of the former argument, and this book is his latest effort in developing that perspective.

In *Worship Across the Racial Divide*, Marti focuses on worship, and specifically the role of music, in promoting “successful”—that is, the integration of two or more racial/ethnic groups in worship—multiracial congregations. While many studies include descriptions of worship services and types of music employed by congregations as a part of their larger analysis, Marti focuses exclusively on music in the context of the structured social space of the worship service. The driving question behind the book is: How does music and worship function in helping to create and maintain successful multiracial congregations? To answer this question, Marti selected 12 multiracial Protestant churches in the greater Los Angeles area, using participant observation and in-depth interviews of over 170 pastors, church leaders, and congregants, as well as additional church archival research to investigate the role of mu-

sic in promoting and nurturing multiracial identity.

The book consists of nine chapters spread across three thematically distinct sections: first, two chapters dealing with popular notions of how race and worship might work, culled both from interviews and “how to” books on developing integrated worship experiences; second, three chapters on how the worship experience and music selection in multiracial churches actually plays out; and third, three chapters on how race is negotiated in these congregations and how congregational diversity is actually achieved through the practice of the music and worship experience. Overall, the book is well written with the prose both clear and engaging. From my perspective, there are a few instances, however, where Marti slips into a somewhat preacherly, or even patronizing, tone apparently intended for those who are either impatient with his arguments, or who may not be as informed as he in understanding multiracial congregations. Regardless, the book is a thoughtful and provocative read.

Marti begins with the premise that recent demographic changes in the United States have led to a significant rise in the desire for racial and ethnic diversity in churches, while also pointing out that there are still very few multiracial churches in the United States. “Integrated worship,” with music as the critical ingredient is key, Marti says, to establishing and cultivating racially diverse churches. For Marti, music is a form of practice rather than just the singing or listening that we might assume, and it is through that practice that music and worship serve to structure diverse relationships between congregants of different racial and ethnic groups.

Ultimately, Marti argues that multiracial churches do not achieve integration simply by accommodating different “racial” music styles, or even that there is such a thing as one model of music and worship that results in successfully integrated worship in multiracial congregations. Rather, that through their structured music and worship practices, successful multiracial churches create space for interaction between congregants of different racial and ethnic groups, which enhances their common bonds beyond racial and ethnic differences. Musical

worship practices then are a structured experience intentionally designed to promote integrated worship experiences and diverse congregations.

This is an interesting and insightful argument, and provides a more nuanced frame through which to understand the power of music and worship—as structured social action—to promote togetherness. I must say, however, owing to the implicit (if not explicit) manipulation of congregants' emotions and spiritual values by church leaders in order to achieve their otherwise laudable goal of racial inclusion and a diverse congregation, Marti's argument raises significant questions about the fundamental values of these church leaders. Minimally one must ask, in what other areas of congregational life do they so intentionally manipulate their congregation, and to what ends? Marti does not address this issue, although he does suggest that music can function as a force of social control. Yet for me, this insight into the manipulation tactics of church leaders is, for lack of a better term, just a little creepy.

Although Marti writes colorful descriptions of how these churches, their leaders, and congregants utilize music in their quest to be racially integrated, what I find missing are descriptions of these churches as congregations with an actual geographic location, history, structure, and particular Christian tradition. What information Marti does provide must be tracked through his narrative depictions, or, once found in the methodological appendix, as summary data across all 12 congregations. Unfortunately, while the aggregate data tells us something about the 12 congregations as a whole, they do not tell us anything about the individual congregations. Further, I find it curious that given his selection of 12 churches located in the Los Angeles area, he never explains why he has focused on Los Angeles, nor does he explore, nor even mention, "place" and its potential role in explaining how music and worship is structured in multiethnic congregations.

With well over 12,000 congregations of all types and traditions in the greater Los Angeles area, an explanation of his geographic and congregational choices, as well as basic information about each congregation, is needed. Such

information would have allowed the reader to understand each congregation and its efforts toward diversity in terms of its social class makeup, dominant racial/ethnic group, where it might be placed within Protestant Christianity (e.g., mainline, evangelical, Pentecostal, charismatic), its theological and religiocultural identity, its internal authority structures (and importantly, how this relates to its racial/ethnic makeup), and where it is located in the social ecology and geography of Los Angeles. Excluding this information, and abstracting music and worship from the larger identity of each church, disallows questions about how these important variables differentially influence the particular ways that each congregation uses music to create and nurture its multiracial identities, and impedes the opportunity to create a more robust theoretical model.

Despite these shortcomings, Gerardo Marti has produced an interesting book focused on music as a key variable in the life of multiracial churches, and how music may help promote particular religious and social outcomes. For this, he is to be commended, and I believe others should follow his example and pay more serious attention to the role of music in the life of multiethnic, or other, religious congregations.

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THE AMERICAN SOUL RUSH: ESALEN AND THE RISE OF SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGE. By Marion Goldman. New York: New York University Press, 2012. xii + 207 pp. \$30.00 cloth.

Marion Goldman takes on a daunting task in this volume: tracing the role that the Esalen Institute played in the growth of human potential spiritualities in contemporary America. Cultural sociology is hard, in large part because the data are so diffuse. How, in a short volume, can one describe an organization, trace its history and its shifting *mythos*, evaluate its social impact, and highlight some of its hidden patterns? How, particularly, can one do this with an

organization that so bears the stamp of the various individuals prominently connected with it? That Goldman does so well is admirable, despite her book's flaws.

Goldman identifies Esalen as both a source and a manifestation of what she calls "spiritual privilege." Though she does not unpack this term until nearly half way through the volume, she is after something important. "Spiritual privilege" refers not just to the fact that wealth and leisure allow the rich and near-rich to develop their inner lives. It also refers to the sense—now culturally common—that the pursuit of personal spirituality is an important task for everyone. In tracing the Institute's history, she is, in effect, tracing the growth of individualized religiosity in our culture. The rise of personal constructed spiritualities is one of the most important religious stories of our era.

Goldman starts with an overview of the Institute's role in the alternative spirituality movement that developed in California during the 1960s and 1970s. Esalen founders Michael Murphy and Dick Price came of age during a postwar prosperity that encouraged young people's personal exploration. They were wealthy enough not to worry about livelihood and educated enough to have a broad sense of possibilities. They turned Michael's family's property at Big Sur hot springs into a retreat center where the famous and not-so-famous gave workshops combining humanistic psychology with elements of Asian religious traditions and bodywork. Fritz Perls was an early (and edgy) presenter; Will Shutz brought his encounter groups and some academic prestige. Abe Maslow gave talks, as did Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, and Richard Alpert (Ram Dass). The latter three fit better with the Institute's growing focus on the experiential over the intellectual. Of the two founders, Michael Murphy was especially interested in programs that could lead to a more enlightened world. Less theoretically, experiments with massage and other forms of bodily spirituality became a distinctive Esalen signature.

Goldman notes that hers is the first comprehensive study of the Institute not done by an insider. She had remarkable access: to the people who have been central over the decades; to seldom-seen documents, tapes, and videos; and

to workshops, retreats, bodywork sessions, and other Institute activities spread over her several years of fieldwork. Add in her command of others' published reflections, and the problem is not lack of data; it is too much of it. After presenting the history, the foundational doctrines, and some of the pathways by which Esalen's influence spread, Goldman surfaces some of the Institute's less obvious dimensions.

Key among these is gender. Not only were the Institute's founders male; so were most of the major workshop leaders, especially in the first decades. Few women have been part of the Institute's inner circle, and those usually gained entry as the result of romances with central males. Many of the "massage crew" are women, but they occupy a second-class status: craftspeople rather than intellectuals, personal healers rather than social transformers. This is partly generational: Esalen was founded before second-wave feminism, so its particular brand of spirituality was generalized from men's lives. For example, founder Michael Murphy's 1972 book, *Golf in the Kingdom*, fails to recognize the gendered nature of a spirituality imaged by a mostly male sport. The Institute's early reputation for free-flowing sexual exploration was also (mainly) a male exploration. Goldman shows how unconscious this has been, though not in order to denigrate the Institute or its leaders. Instead, she shows the ways in which a male-gendered spirituality became normative for both men and women in the human potential movement overall. She gets it right: I used to work at an educational offshoot of this movement; the same unconsciously presumptive male-centeredness reigned there, as well.

Esalen also unconsciously presumed a class privilege. Not everyone who attended workshops was rich, but rich people have more resources than the rest of us and have potentially more leisure time to pursue enlightenment than do those who hold day jobs. This is one side of spiritual privilege. Poorer people did come to Esalen, often on work-study "scholarships," but they were living out the second form of privilege: the privilege to set aside everything else for personal development. Despite its class origins, Esalen helped democratize a spiritually oriented human potential movement. That,

Goldman shows, is one of its lasting achievements.

As a whole, then, the book constitutes rich, if somewhat disjointed, narrative. Goldman has to introduce the Institute before she can present its history, she needs to present both before she can uncover its hidden social patterns, and she has to do all three before she can trace its influence. We, thus, encounter the same stories in several guises. I found myself wishing that Goldman had organized her book more tightly around a strong through-line, though she sort of has one. I specifically wish that she had been clearer early on about what she meant by spiritual privilege, and about its connection to the rise of personal spirituality in American culture. Her book contributes to this story, but there is still theorizing to be done.

The book contains one more thing, which is an absolute gem. The Esalen Institute pioneered an experiential spirituality focused on the personal search for and exploration of transcendent experiences. Goldman gives us a taste of this in an appendix: seven personal and experiential exercises, one each to illuminate her introduction and her six chapters. They are easy to do. They are deep. And they are marvelous. They convey Esalen as no words can.

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APOCALYPSE IN ISLAM. By Jean-Pierre Filiu. Translated by M. B. DeBevoise. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. xxi + 260 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

Apocalyptic rhetoric, eschatology, and related themes drawing on Christianity receive ample attention in European and American scholarship, polemics, and public consciousness. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's *Left Behind* series (Tyndale House, 1995–2007), selling over 60 million copies, is only the most visible example of this in living memory.

In contrast, European and American cognizance of Islamic eschatology is historically minimal, though arguably on the rise. *New York Times* bestsellers by Jewish-to-Christian

convert Joel Rosenberg, *The Twelfth Imam* (Tyndale House, 2010) and *The Tehran Initiative* (Tyndale House, 2011) explicitly reference Shi'i/Shi'a apocalypticism, inaugurating a novel series with *Left Behind's* publishers purportedly integrating Islamic and Christian eschatologies.

Additionally, Syrian/Lebanese-American and conservative media mogul Joseph Farrah distributes a surprisingly well-informed polemic by self-educated author Joel Richardson (a pseudonym), *The Islamic Antichrist: The Shocking Truth About the Real Nature of the Beast* (WND Books, 2009). *The Islamic Antichrist* achieved top-10 Amazon.com rankings in 2011.

Another trendsetter is Palestinian-American Walid Shoebat, a former Muslim highly hostile to Islam. Shoebat blends Christian and Islamic apocalypticism in *Why I Left Jihad: The Root of Terrorism and the Return of Radical Islam* (Top Executive Media, 2005) and *God's War on Terror: Islam, Prophecy and the Bible* (with Joel Richardson, Top Executive Media, 2008).

Beyond novels and polemics, Harvard and Georgetown scholars Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad examine Islamic eschatology in *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (State University of New York Press, 1981/Oxford University Press, 2002) and "The Anti-Christ and the End of Time in Christian and Muslim Eschatological Literature," *The Muslim World* 100 (October, 2010). Rice University professor David B. Cook initiated an academic trilogy by penning *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Darwin Press, 2002) and *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (Syracuse University Press, 2005, 2008). Cook's final title is forthcoming, but the focus of this review is Jean-Pierre Filiu's *Apocalypse in Islam*, which builds on Cook and references the *Left Behind* series as one probable or direct Christian influence on Islamic apocalyptic literature (e.g., p. xii).

In synopsis, Filiu outlines early and medieval Muslim tradition, messianic movements, and apocalyptic imagery in the *Qur'an*, hadith, and prominent Islamic texts by mystics and thinkers such as al-Qurtubi, al-Suyuti,

Ibn 'Arabi, Ibn Kathir, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Taymiyya. Filii broadly surveys historic eschatological proclamations by Sunnis, Twelver Shi'is, Isma'ilis, Druze, and black Muslims. He then delves into contemporary Islamic apocalyptic literature ranging from vividly illustrated Arabic pamphlets, to Muslim claims about Jesus' role in the end-times, and apparently frustrated Muslim elites and clerics (Ulama) who react, reassert, or reformulate Islamic eschatology and apocalyptic tradition to answer, refute, or clarify high-pitched pontifications by self-styled apocalyptic experts, militants, and opportunists.

One significant feature Filii describes is that Sayyid Qutb, al Qaida, and select militants actively shun or denounce messianic pretenses. A possible explanation is that al Qaida wants to avoid its fighters potentially surrendering to the temptation of passively trusting in a messianic figure like Jesus, the Mahdi, or other external heroes to confront and repel the *kafir* (unbelievers).

Among the most disquieting characteristics of contemporary Islamic apocalyptic literature are enraged expressions of revulsion, conspiracy paranoia, and aspirations to annihilate Americans, atheists, Buddhists, Christians, Freemasons, Jews, Zionists, and allegedly false Muslims (e.g., p. 159). All these are variously condemned for supposedly rebelling against God and fomenting turmoil and oppression against faithful Muslims, however delineated. Hindus are curiously absent from this list of apocalyptic adversaries. But India, China, and Russia are slated for Islamic conquest following the projected demise of "Crusader America and Europe" (p. 112).

Filii documents that anti-Jewish Islamic apocalypticism appeals not simply to Western sources of anti-Semitism such as the Nazis and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, but also to historic antecedents in Islamic tradition, hadith, and recurrent allegations that the Muslim antichrist (Dajjal) is Jewish. One of the most notorious anti-Jewish traditions is "The Last Hour will not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews and kill them. And when a Jew will hide behind a [stone] wall of a tree, the wall will cry out, 'O Muslim! O servant of Allah! There is a Jew behind me.' And [the

Muslim] will come to kill him" (p. 17, cf. pp. 124, 204, 222).

Further Islamic apocalyptic literature demonizes Christian Zionists as greater threats than Jews, or envisions Christians and Muslims struggling together against Jews or alternate foes consistent with Surah 5:82 in the *Qur'an*: "Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians': because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant" (Yusuf Ali translation, 1934).

From a scientific study of religion perspective, Filii is vulnerable to criticism for his intermittently value-laden commentary, at least in English translation. But the quality of Filii's presentation is not necessarily diminished by his personal voice. Sympathetic readers may perceive Filii as appropriately punctuating disturbing exposition with incredulity and outrage.

A second critique is that Filii relegates comparisons with Christian apocalyptic literature mainly to an epilogue that reads like an obligatory add-on. Subsequent comparative analysis will better enunciate commonalities, distinctions, and variations among—as well as within—apocalyptic literature in varying religious traditions. Subjects for future scrutiny include genre (Christian-oriented contemporary apocalyptic is often written as fiction), and theologies that leave final judgment to God instead of demanding believers jump-start or facilitate the apocalypse themselves. Even the *Left Behind* series dramatizes deadly divine reckonings but does not depict or endorse faithful Christians waging violent apocalyptic combat. *Left Behind* portrays Christians and Muslims as allies against the satanic antichrist, "Nicolae Carpathia," though some Muslims convert or believe in Jesus as articulated by LaHaye and Jenkins. It is also important to acknowledge that not all apocalyptic literature is unambiguously anti-Jewish. "Nicolae Carpathia" is reprehensible partly because he persecutes Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

Finally, Filii would benefit from collecting or reviewing data on the prevalence of assorted apocalyptic beliefs and their

implications in particular geographic, religious, and cultural populations. How do different shades of apocalyptic belief influence people's lives and decision making? Taking the above considerations into account, Filii delivers a valuable contribution to a frequently neglected topic in European and American scholarship.

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FAITH NO MORE: WHY PEOPLE REJECT RELIGION. By Phil Zuckerman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 240 pp. \$24.95 cloth.

In *Faith No More*, Phil Zuckerman draws on 87 interviews to narrate the stories of people who were once religious, but no longer believe. This adds some much needed qualitative analysis to the social scientific understanding of American secularism. In terms of what counts as an "apostate" for the purposes of the study, there is some ambiguity. The book deals most extensively with theistic disbelief, but in doing so it necessarily intersects with other dimensions of irreligion, such as the absence of practice and affiliation.

Zuckerman's writing is engaging and straightforward, which makes for enjoyable reading. On this count, chapters detailing the narratives of the children of a semi-formal exorcist and informants' experiences with the intersection of sexuality and (ir)religion are dramatic and intriguing. Some of the most insightful personal narratives are voiced by Mormon apostates, for whom the transition away from religion was more a matter of disengaging religious practice and orthodox views of sexuality than philosophically questioning supernatural claims. This stands in contrast to many of the Protestant or Catholic apostates in the study, who placed greater emphasis on disbelief.

The first five substantive chapters make a valuable contribution to the rapidly expanding literature on secularism by offering glimpses into the cognitive, biographical, and social dimensions of apostasy as process and identity.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the study is its ability to demonstrate the diversity of secular expressions by showing how apostate identities reflect or transmute prior religious experiences. By outlining how becoming "not religious" grows out of one's experiences and means different things to different people, the interviews convey meaningful narratives grounded in secular presuppositions. This offers a serious challenge to the often implicit assumption that to make deep meaning individuals must embed their identities in explicitly religious meta-narratives, or that to be moral is to be religious (or vice versa).

In spite of its many strong attributes, I found aspects of the presentation of information flawed at times. The study contains a not-so-subtle promotion of irreligion as not only acceptable, but preferable, generally speaking. From the perspective of sociological inquiry I whole-heartedly support the former, but am wary of the latter. The "cheering" for secularism is manifest in different ways throughout the study. For instance, in giving voice to his informants, Zuckerman frequently adopts their perspective to convey the lived experiences of apostasy. On the whole, this is an effective technique that helps the reader better understand the subjective viewpoint of those interviewed. It also enhances the study's readability; however, it runs aground in some of the conclusions drawn.

Although the problems associated with using first-person biographical reconstructions are acknowledged in the introduction (p. 13), this cautious approach is neglected in practice at times. In detailing "the apostate worldview," it is reported that "morality actually *improves* after individuals undergo a transformation from being religious to secular" and that "personal morality was sharpened, enhanced, and ultimately became more mature once [the informants] left religion behind" (p. 122, emphasis in original). Leaving aside the knotty issue of operationalizing "morality," I believe this takes the interviewees' vocabularies of motive too literally. Just as faithful religious converts (of any type) would report being more moral postconversion, the nonreligious have generated a high level of cognitive and social commitment to their current roles. They are

therefore apt to report it as being superior to their “ex” role. Where adopting the perspective of the informant is beneficial for literary aesthetics, it becomes a liability when there is a need to switch to a more neutral and analytical perspective but the view remains that of the subject.

The promotion of secularism is manifest in other ways as well. The very first page of the book states that in 2003 10 percent of Americans were atheists or agnostics, while in 2009 19 percent were theistic dis- or nonbelievers. These estimates are based on online Harris Interactive polls with two response choices regarding theism. There are samples with sounder collection methods and better response options readily and publicly available. For example, the GSS gives the following estimates for the proportions of American adults who were atheist or agnostic: 6.8 percent in 1991, 7 percent in 2000, and 9.4 percent in 2010. The “wind of secularity” may not be quite the impending gale portrayed, at least if the question is one of theistic belief. While it is well documented that the number of religious nonaffiliates in the United States has increased substantially in recent years, lack of theistic belief has not, to date, risen at the same pace. It may in the future, but that remains an open question. At other points

in the book, complex issues are glossed in favor of secularism. For example, a general negative connection between education and religion is claimed (p. 11), when an extensive body of literature details more complicated relationships, at both the institutional and individual levels. There are also points when the arguments presented echo those of the “new” atheists by shining an ego-bolstering “bright” (p. 174) light on apostasy.

Of course, these criticisms raise the question of audience. For a general educated audience, perhaps such interpretations will effectively counter negative stereotypes and misgivings about the irreligious; however, it is just as likely to “preach to the choir.” For scholars, some of the claims may seem overgeneralized or suggest proselytizing. Still, the study is laudable for its rich interview data, readability, and insight into the lived experiences of American apostates on a variety of dimensions. Most importantly, it explores a growing segment of the American populace and shows how biographical and cultural forces shape expressions of secularism.

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