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Review of M. McGuire, Lived Religion

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They will discover how Appalachian state legislatures have attempted to drive snake handling underground.

In many ways, the proper title of this book should be “them that criticize them that believe.” If Hood and Williamson had managed to forget the critics and shake off their instinctive defensiveness, they could have been considerably more successful in advancing our understanding of the small number of people intent on taking very seriously one specific biblical passage.

Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life. By Meredith McGuire. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pp. ix+290. \$19.95 (paper).

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Meredith McGuire's *Lived Religion* richly endows an expanding academic literature highlighting the relevance of religious-spiritual practices that are typically excluded from the received view of what counts as religion and spirituality. For historians, this has meant engagement in research that revises standard narratives of, for example, early colonial religion and reassessing Puritan beliefs and habits. For sociologists, it generally entails making visible the myriad ways in which religion exists outside the boundaries and categories of orthodoxy established by religious institutions and translated by sociologists into standardized, quantitative measures of belief and practice. Instead, McGuire and other scholars argue for a focus on individuals and how they variously inject spiritual meanings and intentions into what appear as ordinary everyday mundane things and mundane spaces. McGuire speaks of her long-fermenting, personal and intellectual preoccupation with trying to “comprehend individuals’ religions-as-practiced, in all their complexity and dynamism” (p. 5). This book represents the insights and synthesis of that journey. It draws heavily on McGuire’s previous research interviews with Catholic peace-and-justice activists in the 1960s, with Catholic charismatics in the 1970s, with individuals involved in nonmedical healing practices in the 1980s, and more recently, interviews with middle-class Texas Latinas. McGuire also engages other historical and sociological studies that complement her interest in the “invisible elements” (p. 17) that make lived religion far more diverse, multifaceted, and contradictory than is typically recognized, she argues, “by scholars of religion, especially sociologists” (p. 4). Thus McGuire elaborates on the need for sociologists to reconceptualize the categories and boundaries that inform how they think about and study religion (chaps. 1 and 2).

As part of her broad canvass of lived religion, McGuire discusses what is frequently called “popular religion,” especially associated with Hispanic

Catholics (e.g., home altars; chap. 3), but she also makes a strong case for the existence of parallel religious practices among Southern white evangelicals (chap. 4). Thus she argues, “clothing, pictures and posters, jewelry, coffee mugs and bumper stickers [connect domestic space with the divine and] also serve to convey both a message about religion and about the religious identity of the user” (p. 78). McGuire gives her most sustained attention to the significance of bodies in lived religion. “Bodies matter,” she reminds the reader time and again; “Spirituality fully involves people’s material bodies, not just their minds, or spirits . . . and not just bodies in the abstract [but] real bodies” (p. 97). Thus McGuire emphasizes that “lived religion is embodied” (p. 118); it happens in and through human bodies, in various bodily states (e.g., of health, pregnancy, disability, suffering), body postures and movements, and body practices and performances (working, eating, singing, etc.; chap. 5). In particular, McGuire elaborates on the role of an embodied spirituality in personal healing and wholeness (chap. 6). Rejecting the institutional differentiation between medicine and religion and the further differentiation among medical specialties (pp. 133–37), McGuire argues for a holistic understanding of bodies, one that integrates rather than sharply separates physical and spiritual well-being. She draws attention to the significance of an array of embodied spiritual practices in individuals’ everyday routines, including, for example, the laying on of hands, expressive dance, meditation, yoga, centering, simple purification rituals, and the ritualistic use of symbols such as circles and chains to signify bodies’ location in space and individuals’ mind-body-spirit interconnectedness with one another, nature, and the universe as a whole (pp. 138–42). McGuire highlights how such practices are experienced as simultaneously addressing physical, mental, and spiritual needs; the lived religion of these individuals means that “wholeness and holiness were just two ways of thinking about the same thing” (p. 140). Individuals who take a holistic approach to health and healing and who find such an approach effective are likely, McGuire argues, to have little faith in either institutionalized medicine or institutionalized religion (p. 145).

McGuire’s focus on religion and spirituality as embodied experiences leads her to give special attention to “gendered spiritualities” both historically (e.g., the origins of Christian Science) and in contemporary forms of self-identity exploration and transformation (chap. 7). Although generally affirming the emancipatory power of embodied spiritualities, McGuire is also sensitive to how body practices and rituals reflect and express power relationships. Thus she highlights how a largely masculine “virtuoso spirituality” (e.g., some Christian pilgrimages [pp. 173–74]; fraternal brotherhoods; Promise Keepers [pp. 175–77]) is used to reproduce exclusionary gender and other social hierarchies (p. 173). The domestication of spiritual practices, moreover, although beyond the control of church elites, can nonetheless reproduce “harmful” patriarchal expectations regarding women’s inequality. McGuire notes, for example, that

Mexican American communities' popular religious celebration of daughters' coming-of-age promotes a heavily traditional understanding of women's roles as wives and mothers (p. 54). Other "destructive spiritualities," McGuire argues can be found in the hate-orientation embodied in Ku Klux Klan practices (pp. 116–17).

McGuire's thoughtful, intellectually engaging, and well-written book is a welcome addition to the analysis of the prevalence of religion and spirituality in everyday practices. Beyond religion, many readers will benefit from her focused attention to the body, something that sociologists really only began to take seriously in recent decades. The eclectic diversity of the practices that McGuire sees as comprising lived religion/spirituality will undoubtedly make some scholars wonder whether some practices are more consequential than others, and how—as sociologists tied to institutional expectations of quality research—these outcomes should be apprehended and understood. Additionally, McGuire's interest in spotlighting the religious diversity that exists outside of religious institutions leads her to marginalize the diversity, contradictions, and multiple meanings that are found too in institutional religious settings and in sociological analyses of that complexity. This has the unintended effect of suggesting that religious institutions contribute little to "faith and practice in everyday life." Nevertheless, McGuire succeeds in making visible the many hybrid sources of religious community and commitment that might otherwise remain beyond the gaze of scholarly attention.

Beyond Sacred and Secular: Politics of Religion in Israel and Turkey. By Sultan Tepe. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008. Pp. 432. \$39.95.

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Israel and Turkey, the two democracies of the Middle East, also have historical roots in secular nationalism. And they have both recently witnessed a dramatic increase in their religious votes. Shas (International Organization of Torah-Observant Sephardic Jews) won 17 seats in the May 1999 elections to become the third-largest political formation in the Knesset and has remained a central player in Israeli politics. The religious florescence in politics has been even more marked in Turkey as the JDP (Justice and Development Party) garnered 34.31% of the total vote in 2002 and 47% five years later in a landslide victory. Turkey's main nationalist party, the NAP (National Action Party), has also Islamized ideologically in the last decade and has increased its popular appeal.

Beyond Sacred and Secular is an exploration of the parallels and differences of politicized religion in Israel and Turkey. It is full of important insights not only about the religious parties in these two countries but