

Book Reviews

Captain America and the Crusade against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism by Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence. Michigan: Eerdmans 2003. ISBN 0-8028-2859-0. Pp. 408. £11.99. \$18.00.

Joseph Baker's op-ed piece in the November 20th 2004 edition of *The Guardian* describes the current national security advisor for the United States of America and present nominee for the post of Secretary of State—Condoleezza Rice—as a 'modern day Boudicca' and a 'Warrior Princess'. Positioned in the far-right hand corner of this article, is a cartoon drawing of Condoleezza Rice. Wearing a bronze tapered upper breastplate; crowned with a golden helmet; brandishing a shield and clasping a sword, Rice is every bit the 'modern day Boudicca', 'princess warrior' that Baker claims her to be. The title of Baker's article 'Foxy Brown with WMD and a PhD' endorses Rice as a contemporary version of the street-wise heroine 'Foxy Brown', who became one of the more recognizable cinematic pin-ups of the 1960s. According to Baker, the arsenal of academic credentials Rice has garnered, and the political power she has cultivated during her tenure as one of President George W. Bush's top political advisors, qualifies her for entry into this realm of superherodom.

If written when Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence conducted their research for their book *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*, Baker's ode to Condoleezza Rice would have complemented their thesis. Jewett and Lawrence convincingly argue that the majestic powers and the celebrity allure of American superheroes are deeply embedded in the American political and social psyche. They assert that figures like Captain America, champion virtues that American governments can appropriate as synonymous with their own. Strong. Consistently seeking to fight justice. Triumphant. The epitome of good and the determined fighter against evil. Valiant. The gatekeeper and protector of the highest of moral values. Dynamic. More than a conqueror. Courageous, and a defender of the people, are catch phrases describing Captain America or any administration which draws parallels with itself and the persona of a superhero.

Jewett and Lawrence contend that the American government and the spin-doctors, with their propensity to manufacture political sound-bites to justify government policies, have long utilized popular cultural images to foster zealous nationalism. Throughout the course of American history, politicians have

married this zealous nationalism with what Jewett and Lawrence call the 'tradition of prophetic realism' (p. 8). In sum, American leaders have asserted that they have a God-given calling to defend, at any cost, the tenets and infrastructures of democracy against any 'evil forces' that would endanger its existence. As a result, the apocalyptic language of the Bible translates into the moral fervor of a nation captivated by the lure of 'religious absolutes' (p. 2). This philosophy of prophetic realism, together with America's fascination with superheroes such as Captain America, spawns the formation of a brand of civil religion that permits religious language to bleed into the jargon of political rhetoric. The 'crusading mentality' behind this manifestation of religion allows American leaders to put on the ideological mask of a 'selfless crusader', whilst 'circumvent[ing] the law, to rescue the innocent' (p. xiv). As Jewett and Lawrence argue, '[t]ranslated as an impulse for the world stage, the mythic imperative requires shielding American warriors in the war against terrorism, no matter how many rules they break or how unpopular they become' (p. xiv). Within the rubric of implicit religion, terms such as the 'axis of evil', and 'the war against terror', evoke a political faith language that calls on Americans to practise a form of civil religion both in action and in their everyday speech. But the far-reaching consequence of this sensibility permeates America's relations with other nations. Jewett and Lawrence contend that America isolates itself from its allies and from the world community by advocating the principle that '[i]f you are not for us, you are against us; anyone who fails to support our world-wide crusade is giving aid and comfort to terrorists, and so forth' (p. xv).

Jewett and Lawrence line up a series of historical episodes to substantiate their assertions. They maintain, '[t]he Puritans were so deeply imbued with Daniel and Revelation that the use of such terminology became habitual, and the moderating tradition of biblical co-existence was overlooked' (p. 221). After the American Revolution, the notion that America is the saintly defender of good, and the destined ruler over evil, fosters a sense of purpose and 'feeling of superiority' over their European forbears. John Adams' letter to Thomas Jefferson in November 12, 1813 captures this sentiment when he confirms that '[m]any hundred years must roll away before we shall be corrupted. Our pure, virtuous, public spirited, federative republic will last forever, govern the globe and introduce the perfection of man' (p. 221).

In recalling Wilson's decision to lead America into World War I, Jewett and Lawrence point out that '[a]s in 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic', Americans would die unselfishly to set people free. The elements of prophetic realism had been blotted out by the ideology of zealous nationalism, and it was the Book of Revelation's spirit that animated the whole' (p. 72). They aptly show that such sentiments masked the underlining contradictions and agenda influencing Wilson's foreign policy. Before sounding his battle cry for war, Wilson 'led the country in the role of the righteous neutral, waiting for others to exhaust

themselves before stepping in to enforce a lasting peace' (p. 71). Once Wilson positioned America as a bastion for peace, he soon became aware of the apparent contradiction such a stance posed when he made plans to enter his nation into the fray of World War I. To justify this shift in thought, Wilson 'slipped into a zealous line of argument' by accusing the German imperial government of being consumed with 'selfish and autocratic power' and in this pursuit they 'cunningly contrived plans of deception or aggression' (p. 72). The outcome of such speeches led to '[a] powerful surge of enthusiasm approaching hysteria [that] swept over the country in the wake of Wilson's call to millennial battle' (pp. 72-73).

When America readied itself 'for a major ground war' initiative in the Persian Gulf, President George H.W. Bush addressed the National Religious Broadcasters saying, 'America has always been a religious nation—perhaps never more than now' (p. 2). His later appropriation of a passage from the book of Ecclesiastes reinforced his contention that there is 'a time for peace, a time for war' (p. 2). In the course of his speech, President George H.W. Bush launched into a tirade of 'religious absolutes' when he declared that the call for military action in the Gulf was necessary because it was predicated on the principles of 'good versus evil, right versus wrong, human dignity and freedom versus tyranny and oppression' (p. 2). Jewett and Lawrence describe how President Bush concluded his speech by 'audaciously proclaim[ing]' that America wanted 'nothing for themselves', and that the partners of the Gulf War coalition were 'on the side of God' (p. 2).

Bill Clinton is accused of manipulating biblical language to 'save his own skin', when his brand of 'conventional patriotism', came under fire from political opponents, who found him unworthy of public office. Jewett and Lawrence go on to claim that '[o]ne of Clinton's most troubling legacies in terms of civil religion came with the war in Kosovo and the air campaign against Serbia' (p. 129). They go on to make the accusation that 'instead of seeking an internationalist route through the United Nations—where he anticipated obstruction from Russia and China—Clinton chose to use the NATO alliance as an umbrella for American bombing, which raised constitutional issues at home and engendered enormous ill will abroad' (p. 129). Similarly Jewett and Lawrence's analysis of the Bush Administration's contentious role in the war on Iraq raises similar questions and reaches similar conclusions.

While attentive to the seriousness of their research, Jewett and Lawrence do not ignore the comical side of war. They include in their collection of satirical cartoons, a picture published in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* that transposes the faces of key members of President George W. Bush's Cabinet onto the bodies of famous superheroes. President Bush is reincarnated as Rambo; Colin Powell stars as Batman; Condoleeza Rice is adorned in the attire of Xena, Warrior Princess; Vice President Cheney stands tall as 'The Terminator' and

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is transformed into 'Conan the Barbarian'. Jewett and Lawrence wryly comment that when shown this picture by Daniel Coats, the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, President Bush was not only flattered by such comparisons, but went on to order 'thirty-three poster-size renditions of the cover to be conveyed back to the White House' (p. 43).

Skilfully written, and well researched, Jewett and Lawrence's book provides a litany of convincing arguments as to why 'civil religion', as practised within the political realm, can be harmful, even destructive, to the basic principles of American democracy. They support their research with a wealth of primary materials and a cluster of well chosen secondary materials that illuminate their candid appraisal of the reasons and purposes of war. In this respect, it is refreshing to read a piece of scholarship written by scholars who have the conviction to put forward their ideas in a clear and highly readable manner.

Through their scholarship, Jewett and Lawrence intend to expose the contradictions lying behind America's *persona* as a fighter against evil. They are committed to sustaining 'the ideals of constitutional democracy' (p. xv). They aim to emphasize how the 'zealous cult of the nation' infringes the civil liberties of its citizens. And it is their ultimate goal to promote the 'healthier strands of faith and ethics that lie at the heart of every great religion' (p. xvi). Interestingly, they ascertain that 'highly consistent stereotypes' in biblical history 'did not arise', which suggests that leaders, social movements and religious factions that appropriate scripture to buttress their beliefs deviate from the Bible's shunning of stereotypes (p. 216).

When making suggestions on how to 'overcome destructive stereotypes' Jewett and Lawrence formulate five strategies that are drawn from insights made by biblical thinkers such as Kierkegaard and the gospel writings that centre on the words and actions of Jesus (p. 237). This proves to be a useful section in this book, as Jewett and Lawrence attempt to feature biblical strategies that 'humanize individuals and nations by freeing them from the grip of idolatrous stereotypes' (p. 237). For instance, one of the five strategies featured in this section addresses how '*to humanize the Bad Person*'. To illustrate this perspective, they refer to the story of The Good Samaritan (Lk. 10.29-37) and they surmise that this 'story decisively undercuts the stereotype that presumes Samaritans to be bestial, unfeeling, and cruel louts' (p. 241).

At times one wonders whether Jewett and Lawrence's findings will convince hardline right wingers to shift their perspective on 'the war on terror'. But maybe the point of Jewett and Lawrence's research is not to sway the opinions of those who support Bush or any other president's foreign and domestic policy, but to introduce another scholarly voice into the academic forum on the politics and influences of 'civil religion' on contemporary society. Those critical of American foreign policy will find further ammunition to use in their political assault against their intended target—those who misuse 'civil religion'

by stockpiling an armoury of ideological and political weapons that they can then use to bolster and defend their zealous nationalism. Does Jewett's and Lawrence's study foster a brand of zealous criticism that contributes to further ideological polarization? If this is the case, I am compelled to ponder on the words of a preacher who during one of his sermons jokingly confessed to his congregation that in being hyper critical of the Pharisees he had become a Pharisee of the Pharisees.

For Jewett and Lawrence, the 'dilemma of zealous nationalism' emerges from the conflicts that a nation suffers and wrestles with when it is seemingly under attack. How does this nation ensure the safety of its citizens and its ideological tenets while battling against and trying to find avenues of peace with its enemy? While emphasizing the dominant role American governments play on the world stage, Jewett and Lawrence's research tends to imply that most Americans are easily duped by political rhetoric. And this perspective may point to other flaws in their scholarship. By linking American leaders with the allure of the superhero, their findings cast politicians like President George Bush into the mould of caricature. As a result a multi-layered appraisal of his policies is somewhat compromised because, in keeping with the *persona* of a superhero he performs to type, which in essence undermines any serious attempts to articulate a complex appreciation of Bush's persona or his administrative policies. In the hands of Jewett and Lawrence's impressive scholarship, have American leaders been cast in the role of evil-monger, the scourge of the world, the baddy? I am not an expert on the history and personality of superheroes, but it is my feeling that Captain America fits nicely into the theoretical paradigm that Jewett and Lawrence put forward in their work. Would an examination into other American superheroes complicate, or at best add further dimensions, to Jewett and Lawrence's analysis into the relationship between American popular culture and the political formations of American history?

In all, Jewett and Lawrence end their work by making the appeal that Americans should not abandon their constitutional heritage but transform it by cultivating an attitude of introspection that allows them to 'struggle against what is dark within ourselves' (p. 324). Rather than separate themselves from this endeavour, Jewett and Lawrence state that this process of self-examination should be a collective effort that 'calls for the transformation of the mythic forms that shape our culture and define the patterns of our politics. It calls for a creative rechanneling of Captain America's impulse to 'fight for right' toward a religious commitment that is shaped by self-critical questioning and a sense of hope about the possibilities of peace' (p. 324). At the end of the day, will the evidences presented by Jewett and Lawrence motivate people from all walks of life to look at the dark side of their motives and beliefs, and change their view

of themselves and the world at large? Or will they dig themselves deeper into the trenches of their political convictions? Only time will tell.

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The Racing Tribe, by Kate Fox. London: Metro Books, 2005. ISBN 1843581566. 288 pp.

'Going racing is like drinking alcohol, taking drugs or practising transcendental meditation, all activities fulfilling a fundamental human need for escape from the restrictions of mundane existence.' So writes Kate Fox in the very first chapter of her study of *The Racing Tribe*. Research for her book was carried out with the active co-operation not only of the British Horseracing Board, but also with the active recommendation of that great observer of *Homo Sapiens*, Desmond Morris.

It is ostensibly a book that tries to plug a gap. The author argues that we have witnessed endless studies of other sports, football especially, with whole academic institutes now devoted to studying the tribal behaviour of the football fan, his/her obsessions and, of course, that great black mark of British society of the 1970s and 1980s: the football hooligan. This she argues is because funding and interest in such social domains has largely been a response to governmental concern about social unrest and disturbance. However, since the phenomenon of racing wars, and the sight of Ascot ladies in their bright flowery hats charging the police with Molotov cocktails, is not a sight we have had to adjust to, serious examination of the tribe has, until this study, been conspicuous by its absence. Peaceful sports which generally promote social cohesion do not attract generous grants from the Economic and Social Research Council.

Fox sets about her task by making dozens of visits to racecourses and stables all over the country in her attempt to conduct racing's first serious anthropology. She conducts numerous interviews with (initially suspicious) owners, trainers, jockeys, bookmakers and punters, in her attempt to decode the racing tribe's own inner identity. Of particular interest to this reviewer was her attempt to view racing behaviour through the prism of religious or semi-religious language. My own recent experience of presenting a Channel Four documentary, *Hallowed Be Thy Game*, which asked whether soccer had become a great modern religion, was more than just a useful preparation in trying to see parallels with another great spectator sport. And Fox certainly seems keen in this book to examine the theme. She applies the label 'witch doctor' to horse

trainers on the grounds that, unlike most of the racing fraternity, they keep to themselves and are 'remote, mysterious and secretive'. 'Like witch doctors,' she asserts, 'trainers rely to a large extent on blind faith to keep their existing *clientèle*'. One could of course put the government spin doctor in exactly the same category on these criteria, yet surely the classic African witch doctor is appealing to a sense of the supernatural, the unknown? It is as though the author, eager to elevate her material to a lofty status, finds some pre-established quasi-religious categories and then, somewhat unconvincingly, shoehorns the evidence into them.

Take another example: our colourful and indispensable army of bookmakers. These men and their clerks roam the country from meeting to meeting in their attempt to attract custom from the widespread ranks of punters. Their family names are legendary, stretching back, in some cases, over a hundred years. 'Bookies', claims the author, 'perform a quasi-religious function which is, in some respects, analogous to that of the medieval 'sin-eater': the person hired at the funeral to take upon himself 'the sins of the deceased person'. An interesting and eyebrow-raising assertion that begs some detailed exposition. But once again, the book fails to deliver. All we are told is that because the bookie is caricatured as greedy, shadowy and sinful, the racing tribe are somehow, by a process of auto-reflective comparison, cleansed of their sins. This claim, the author concedes towards the end of the book, is one of the less convincing observations of her work and she has the honesty to report the doubts cast upon this parallel by those from the racing fraternity who digested her findings. The fact is that it is a claim which she flatly contradicts with her own empirical findings. The bookie's clerk, who works in tandem alongside the so-called 'sin-eater', it turns out, is normally an individual steeped in virtue. 'A punter who has perhaps had a few too many beers may stumble up to the bookie with three tickets, having forgotten which horses he backed or how much he bet on each, relying on the clerk to check the ticket numbers and remind him'. Given that the clerk is employed by the bookie and makes not a single move without his boss's assent, where does this leave our image of the villainous creature that 'taketh away the sin of the world'? I think one of the difficulties is that the author, by so fastening her gaze on the behaviour of the various *dramatis personae*, misses out on an obvious angle: the appearance of the horses and why humans gather in such numbers to watch them. She rightly points out that at your average race meeting, the actual time spent watching the horses compete amounts to very little. At a typical 'flat event' (races without fences), an opening race might be at 2.00 pm and the last of seven contests might finish at 5.35. Each race, depending on the distance, lasts somewhere between one and three minutes, leaving oodles of time for all the social rituals and etiquettes that anthropologists thrive on: the marking of the race cards, the ease with which one can flirt ('what do you fancy in the

2.30?’ is a perfectly innocent conversation starter, once the rudiments of the weather have been dispensed with, and the format of racing, argues Fox, allows just the right balance between external distraction and social exchange for it to be a perfect domain in which male and females can test one another out). But what of the horses? Our anthropologist admits that her foci of attention are the people, and solely the people. To this end, even at thrilling climaxes to races with nags heading towards the finishing post in a potential dead heat, she would always have her back turned to the action, staring at the facial expressions and behaviour of those for whom heaven or hell might consist in no more than a short head. Amusingly, this occasionally gave rise to misunderstandings. Conventional behaviour dictates at races that when you have bet a small fortune on a horse and you are so nervous/unsure of its prospects, one turns one’s back on the action and faces the other way, occasionally giving rise in this instance to cries of: ‘poor thing: she must have her coat on that one’.

My point is, by omitting serious discussion of the race itself, and especially how the animals themselves acquit themselves, doesn’t this amount to a serious lacuna in a study such as this? Back to the football again briefly. When fans at their most loquacious talk in semi-religious terms about the beauty of the game, they dwell on the actions on the field i.e the language is one of transcendence. One man I interviewed for the TV film had written a book about football and the kingdom of God, and spoke in earnest terms about how, in football, humans give glory to God by the use of their extraordinary skills and the hypnotic use of space. If this can inspire such feelings among football followers, then I would argue any serious discussion about racing in terms of religion, ought to focus more on the beast itself. Perhaps some reading this will remember Peter Shaffer’s extraordinary play from the 1970s, *Equus*? At the start of the play, a stable boy has inexplicably attacked a horse with a knife and tried to blind it, and the drama seeks to unveil the back story from the boy’s point of view to explain to the audience how a young boy, so smitten and obsessed with horses, could have done such a ghastly thing. We learn that his anti-religious father, tiring of the irrational, mother-inspired devotions to the Virgin Mary in his house, tears down all such images and replaces them with secular ones. The young teenager now finds a picture of a horse on his wall in place of the painting of our Blessed Mother. Slowly he becomes fixated with it and wants to spend more and more time near horses. He gets his wish and becomes a stable boy. He literally worships the animals: he describes their almost divine features, their muscular strength and penetrating, all-knowing eyes, the grace and mesmerizing manner in which they move. Then, in the *denouement*, he is seduced by one of the stable girls. They make love in the hay, but despite the boy’s attempts to guard the space and his privacy, a horse intrudes and passes its head around the door, catching him and his seducer in the act. Traumatized by guilt and a sense of the shame of being seen to be sexual in front of his ‘God’, the boy lashes out in rage and attacks the horse with a knife.

I am not, of course, suggesting that all race-goers inhabit this crazy world of equine god-worship. But they are very special beasts nonetheless, and anyone who has been to a race meeting, admiring the pace, composure and breathtaking *majesty* (that is not too strong a word), of these wonderful creatures, must agree that the inspiring effect and hold that they themselves have on the punters, cannot be left out of any serious discussion of 'the racing tribe.' Just listen to the language people use when the horses are paraded in the paddock and fix closely on the stares that they elicit; it doesn't happen with greyhounds.

That omission aside, I think *The Racing Tribe* is a clearly accessible and unpretentiously written book that would appeal to those who might consider themselves 'way off the pace' when it comes to racing. Fox has a good ear for the jokes, strange terminology and banter on the racecourse which she manages to weave into her findings in a convincing manner. It is also a pleasant change to see someone enjoying themselves so much with the task that they have set, and this comes through on numerous occasions. Mind you, this might have to be held in check a little should this work need to progress any further. The author, clearly delighted by the reaction of the British Horseracing Board to her study, basks in the acceptance and positive esteem which her work has afforded her. On the very final page she writes: 'I now felt part of this culture. These were my friends. I was the Racing Tribe's anthropologist and I wanted to be a good ambassador for them'.

Perhaps someone might have a word about the dangers of going native?

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Religion, Secularization and Social Change in Wales: Congregational Studies in a Post-Christian Society, by Paul Chambers. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7083-1884-3. 246 pp. £16.99.

Assumptions are there to be challenged, and part of the task of a sociologist is to do just that: to challenge assumptions of popular opinion, of press and public media, of politicians and policy makers and, of course, of other sociologists. Paul Chambers sets out to challenge three assumptions: that religious institutions inevitably decline in the face of modernity; that this is the clear result of a process of secularisation; and, that evangelical and sectarian religious groups are better than others at resisting decline and at recruiting new members.

Chambers' study is based on a detailed ethnographic examination of a number of churches in Swansea in South Wales. The real heart of this book consists of a

riveting account of the life and dynamics of eight churches. Five of these had just about reached 'the end of the line': 'Zion', an English Baptist church; 'Hope Chapel', another English Baptist church; 'Shiloh', a Welsh-speaking independent church; 'Faith Tabernacle', an evangelical Presbyterian church; and 'St. Jude's', an Anglican church. The other three are not quite so near demise: 'St. John's', an Anglican church with a popular team of clergy; 'Maestref Baptist Church', a suburban church with an ageing congregation; and 'Westside Evangelical Church', a newer and growing independent church.

Before giving these accounts, the author puts matters in context. First, he sets out the pretty devastating statistics of changes in church affiliation in Wales over the past two hundred years. In doing so, he shows how short-lived were the great days of glory for Welsh Nonconformity: the decline had started in the early years of the twentieth century, despite the 1904 revival, and was well-established by 1920. In this we see that the rise and fall of religious institutions is part of a wider scene of changes of fortune for other movements and institutions in society. Here are the seeds of his criticism of any view of secularisation which sees it as an autonomous process triggered by modernisation.

The second part of Chambers' context-setting consists of a fairly comprehensive survey of the variants of the secularization theory. This is not likely to be easy going for the general reader. After noting the origin of the term as referring to the sequestration of church assets by secular authorities initiated during the Reformation (and from which the church in Britain has never recovered), he describes the development of the concept into a sociological theory. David Martin, Bryan Wilson, Talcott Parsons, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann and other major contributors to the secularization debate are quoted and their contributions succinctly explained. It is a little surprising here not to see the debate related to other basic streams of sociological thinking such as those of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, although Chambers' own indebtedness to Durkheim is made explicit later in the book. Rather more perplexing is the author's provisional definition of secularization: 'the process whereby religion ceases to be a significant part of the common life of members of a society' (p. 21). This is an entirely legitimate working definition but it appears prior to the review of what other people have meant when they used the word. 'Secularization' can be an unhelpful word because of the variety of meanings attached to it. Further, inclusive definitions are especially unhelpful in the task of analysing interrelated elements of social change. They hinder the process of distinguishing one phenomenon from another and assessing their possible interdependence. Notwithstanding, the tightly packed section on the secularization thesis is well worthwhile, if only for the rich store of references to seminal sociological writers which it contains. It is followed by a useful account of Swansea and the religious life of its inhabitants. This forms a more specific introduction to those local churches which are examined in detail in the subsequent chapters.

The 'terminal cases', as one can't help calling the first five churches which Chambers examines, are described with kindness and respect, but also honesty about what is happening to them. Zion Baptist Church is the one of the four which is considered in most detail. A very small number of elderly, dedicated folk, saddled with an impossible building, look back in bewilderment at their transition from a vibrant powerhouse of the community to their present state. The picture is of a remnant of a society which has all but disappeared, a remnant about to disappear itself. The next four churches are described more briefly, so as to illustrate the phenomenon further. Hope Chapel, whilst having been through a very similar history to Zion, has been saved by a property deal resulting in its being relocated in new, bright premises which form part of a sheltered housing complex. It has, therefore, found a new role in relation to the residents of the complex; but for how long? Shiloh was a chapel serving a Welsh-speaking rural community, which has been swallowed up and dispersed by the expansion of Swansea. Faith Tabernacle, being a Presbyterian church, is not left to fend for itself like the independent and Baptist chapels. It is likely to close as part of denominational rationalization.

St. Jude's, a parish church of the Church in Wales, does not have to directly finance its own professional ministry: the Bishop has appointed a woman as full-time stipendiary minister. Her pastoral work and well-developed network of relationships with the wider community give a brighter picture than the Nonconformist chapels, but, again, for how long? The operation is subsidised by the Diocese, finance and buildings are a worry and there is doubt that the minister will be replaced when she retires. Again it appears to be a church whose original role within the wider community has disappeared. All five of these churches are severely affected by the far-reaching social and economic changes in the communities in which they are set.

Another Anglican Church is the next to be examined: St. John's. This church has experienced a growth in attendance. A new, liberal/traditional vicar has succeeded an evangelical incumbent whose ministry fractured the relationship between the church and the culture in which it was set. It illustrates the challenge to the theory that evangelical churches attract more adherents. The new vicar and his curate have reinstated traditional patterns *and* developed new work. Yet again, the future is uncertain, given that the lay leadership of the church seems not to be open to adapting the life of the church at the same pace as changes in their community. An Anglican inclusive pattern of pastoral ministry, that is, being available to meet the needs of all who live within the geographical parish and not just those who come to church, maintains links with the wider community, while the external financial support for full-time ministry provides the possibility of good leadership. The impression is, however, still of weakening links with the wider community and, should the vicar move, increasing dissonance with its culture.

Maestref Baptist Church is a church which is still viable but determinedly inward looking: its prime purpose is to maintain the social groups and fellowship enjoyed by its existing, and, of course, ageing, members. Membership is still comparatively strong but is elderly and steadily declining. The church makes no connections with the vast majority of the suburbanites who live in the area. Chambers doesn't make the point explicitly, but what he describes is a group having undergone a classic displacement of objectives: Christian mission by social fellowship.

Finally, Westside Evangelical Church is a completely independent new church of 'liberal evangelical' tradition and strong lay leadership. Leadership is organized on business principles, making use of the demonstrated expertise offered by members. It has experienced phenomenal growth through carefully planned work, including children's work and a network of house groups. Most of the growth has, however, been through transfer of membership from other evangelical churches, especially those with more rigid rules and more tightly defined membership. The church gives 'freedom' to those from more restrictive churches. Westside is also engaged in a range of community initiatives, and benefits from a lack of real competition from any other local Nonconformist chapels. It is a cautiously told success story.

Out of all of this, Chambers concludes that the growth or decline of local churches is determined more by the vigour of the local community which it serves, and the strength of its genuine networks within that community, than by any general social process associated with modernity. He contends that there are too many variants of the theory of secularization, often presented in such abstract forms that it is increasingly difficult 'to see the wood for the trees' (p. 200). His argument is convincing.

Specific factors such as the decline of traditional industries, the break-up of Welsh language communities, the expansion of the city and associated population movements, have 'altered the traditional religious ecology of the area' (p. 201). Whilst this is true, it is also the case that these factors themselves could be seen as facets of modernity and, if so, their consequences for local churches could be described as the secularizing consequences of a general process: namely, secularization. Again, Chambers often refers to the effects of components of secularization, such as privatisation, thereby seeming to acknowledge its validity as a concept. The force of his argument remains, however, that 'the success or failure of religious groups is *primarily* dependent, not on some abstract process characterized as 'secularization', but on the rather more immediate environmental conditions and considerations that impact on congregations' (p. 223, emphasis in the original). He admits that secularization exists, but contends that it is quite inadequate to describe what is actually happening to local religious groups.

This book is worthy of the attention of sociologists to help ground the development of concepts in the careful consideration of the totality of some local experiences: avoiding the temptation selectively to choose those aspects of local experience which happen to support the theory being developed. It is, with the possible exception of chapter two, well worth the attention of the general reader as a most acute observation of human dynamics. It should be compulsory reading for church leaders: local church leaders, for the objective picture it gives of what is happening in some local churches, and those leaders responsible for appointing clergy and ministers, to blow away preconceptions about which styles of ministry are likely to lead to the strengthening of local churches.

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Religion and Spirituality in the Life Cycle, by James Gollnick. Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2005. ISBN 0-8204-7411-8. 277 pp. £20.40.

This book is about the vital importance of spirituality to psychology and psychotherapy. Gollnick provides a great deal of evidence about this, from the transformation stories associated with the mystery religions, to the research carried out by psychologists of religion, notably by William James and James Fowler (and many more, including a reassuringly lucid account of Jungian individuation: the more aware we become of the God-image in ourselves, the more we *become* our true selves). More particularly, Gollnick concentrates on the association between psychological development and spiritual growth, examining theories about, and models of, what ranges from the classical period of Greek and Roman philosophy to the contemporary work of Ken Wilber and Michael Washburn. (For my own part, and almost certainly because of my circumstances, the most relevant section is the one dealing with old age...)

The role of psychotherapy in the development of spiritual awareness and the concomitant growth of our humanness is powerfully brought home:

Psychotherapy explores the degree to which people's worldviews reflect their actual personal and social situations rather than outmoded assumptions growing out of earlier and sometimes traumatic experiences. Within an updated map, people are better able to find meaning in life and personal fulfilment (p. 137).

Building on Fowler, Gollnick locates the specific healing power of spirituality in its effect within three crucial areas of human awareness: 'identity, values and

worldview'. Together these constitute the psychological realm occupied by 'key elements of spirituality or implicit religion' (p. 40).

This phrase, 'spirituality or implicit religion' (or, more frequently, *and* implicit religion) crops up frequently within Gollnick's discussion. Each time it recurs, however, it causes me—as a student of Implicit Religion—a particular kind of distress. Gollnick's purpose in addressing the notion of implicit religion is, he says, to 'expand its use by focusing on (its) psychological dimensions' (p. 2). This is certainly a laudable aim; however, in this case it involved Implicit Religion's almost total homologisation with spirituality itself. Gollnick regards this approach as a way of talking psychologically about a sociological category. Unfortunately for his purposes, in order to do this he is forced to ignore implicit religion's identifying characteristic as a category of human thought—its basic identity as a sociological phenomenon. Both explicit and implicit religion are socially structured; indeed, social organisation is one of the 'extensive effects' of an 'intensive concern'. Whereas spirituality is by definition private and 'interior', to desocialise implicit religion is altogether to miss the point of mentioning it in the first place. Gollnick's psychologising approach certainly has the effect of rescuing Implicit Religion from the charge that its absence of explicit religiousness implies shallowness or lack of authenticity; but to allow it to become a synonym for the spiritual element in human awareness is to deprive it of any kind of distinctive significance whatsoever.

For Gollnick, implicitness relates to a primal awareness, a stage of human growth and development preceding the explicit communication of ideas, when identity, values and worldview are functioning at a pre-propositional, not-yet-thought-out, stage of psychological development, which corresponds to Michael Novak's 'first level of religion as simply living out a story' (p. iii). For him, the intangible, unthinkable reference of religious metaphor is clearly distinguishable from its doctrinal interpretation—and this is what he means by 'implicit'.

The drawbacks of this approach seem to me to be considerable. It is not enough, from an Implicit Religion point of view, simply to characterize anything deep and unspoken in someone's religious awareness as 'implicit religion'. All the same, James Gollnick makes a very important distinction between the religion of the soul's awareness, and mere conformity to the ideology promulgated by churches and religious institutions; and he is surely right to draw attention to the kind of 'soul bullying' sometimes carried out by church authorities at their members' expense. At this level, psychology and sociology certainly speak with the same voice.

He is also right to chronicle the development of spiritual awareness on the part of scientifically orientated disciplines, showing itself in the increased willingness to regard spirituality as an inescapable fact of human life, and consequently a proper subject for serious investigation. In practical terms this means that spiritual pathologies require the same attention from professional healers

as do the various kinds of psychological illness; an understanding enshrined within the recent Category IV addition to the US *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*—the first, says Gollnick, to acknowledge that:

religion refers to the beliefs and practices of organised, religion, while spirituality indicates a transcendent relationship, to a Higher Being, beyond any specific religious affiliation (p. 147).

It is obvious on which side of the fence Gollnick himself belongs. I myself doubt, however, that ‘implicit’ actually means ‘unofficial’ in this straightforward sense. On the other hand, I have even graver doubts about the validity of any qualitative distinction between spiritual experience and religious belonging, whether this be explicit or implicit.

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Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts: The Role of the Church in a Time of No Religion, by Alan R. Billings. London: SPCK, 2004. ISBN 0-281-05704-4.

Alan Billings, from his unique dual perspective as Director of Lancaster University’s Centre for Ethics and Religion, and as Vicar of the Lakeland parish of Kendal, can claim attention as a respected academic who is also in close contact with the culture and life of an ordinary community in a country town.

While distancing himself from the idea that people may be naturally spiritual (or ‘implicitly religious’), he suggests that an influential core of belief and sense of belonging has survived the 20th century decline in institutional religion and the promotion of secularism through new therapeutic cultures.

Faith leaders, deprived of a ‘useful’ place in society, often seek role-reinforcement, either by closing ranks and fuelling a rise in fundamentalism with shallow, over-simplified teaching, or by moving sideways into socially acceptable community work that fulfils a sense of vocation not always seen as being religious.

Yet most Britons still see themselves as having religious core beliefs, even if they have little time for old traditional religious disciplines, routine practices and expenses—but, as school training in beliefs falters, children acquire less of an ability to judge later, with understanding based on knowledge.

Alan Billings’ Table II (p. 27), contrasting ‘Views of the Human condition as seen by Christianity and Therapeutic Culture’, is a chilling reminder, for some in the 21st century, of how far militant secularism has affected official thinking about vulnerable citizens, with little expectation of any challenge.

Half a century of European drift from religious principles to material self-fulfilment is reflected in many features of contemporary society, and provides a basis for extremist views to flourish, where people have not been adequately educated, as Ninian Smart foresaw at Lancaster over forty years ago.

Christian ordinands and teachers could do worse than reflect on lay expectations of ministry expressed in one rural parish, and on the author's analysis of today's 'Church Tendencies', both at official and local levels, plus his perceptive counteracting 'Principles' for correcting course while there is still time. Indeed there is nourishment here for more than just *church* ministry.

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Group Spirituality: A Workshop Approach, by Roger Grainger. Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003. ISBN 1-58391-916-3 (hbk). 192 pp. £40; ISBN 1-58391-917-1 (pbk). 192 pp. £14.99.

Roger Grainger is a chartered counselling psychologist and parish minister who for a long time worked as a chaplain in a psychiatric hospital. He also has a professional association with the theatre and his book has a preface by the actor Richard Briers.

In the space of five chapters and one hundred and sixty pages Grainger draws together a wide range of approaches to the use of group work in the exploration of the spiritual life. He has many interesting things to say about the importance of embodiment and of group building in relation to spirituality, which all too often is seen as disembodied and solitary.

In the next chapter insights drawn from Winnicott about space as a transitional object lead to a thoughtful consideration of sacred space. There are further chapters about storytelling, dreams as sources of spiritual insight and a final important statement about bringing things down to earth. Each chapter is enlivened by practical examples of workshops conducted by the author and with quotations from some of the participants.

In such a short book it would be too much to ask for blanket coverage of a very large field. Nevertheless there were some absentees that I would like to have seen mentioned because they are highly salient to Grainger's theme. The first is the work of the philosopher-therapist Eugene Gendlin on the 'felt sense' of reality. This perspective has been taken up very fruitfully by Peter Campbell and Ed McMahon, Catholic priests and workshop leaders at the Institute for Bio-Spiritual Research in Colorado, as described in their book *Bio-Spirituality*.

Another missing person is Gordon Lawrence, formerly joint director of the Group Relations Training Programme at the Tavistock Institute. In recent years he has developed a remarkable series of workshops on 'social dreaming' based on the ideas of the German psychoanalyst Charlotte Beradt. This perspective would add considerably to Grainger's reminder that dreams are often implicitly religious, or as John Sanford put it, *God's Forgotten Language*. All in all though, this book gives a brief but helpful overview of an approach to spirituality that is likely to be of increasing importance in an age when the religious impulse often remains implicit.

But now I need to add an important caveat about the ways that group work can sometimes encourage immature religion. From time to time in past years it has occurred to people professionally involved in this area that there may be a connection with the realms of spirituality or religion. Back in the 1960s Wilfred Bion, founding father of the Group Dynamics programme at the Tavistock, occasionally noticed what he took to be religious responses on the part of people in his Small Group. Members would sometimes behave in a manner suggesting they believed that in some God-like miraculous way the consultant (Bion) would solve all their problems. In the example mentioned in his book, *Experiences in Groups*, Bion took it that the response came from the person's unconscious, since at the overt level he claimed to be an atheist. If Bion is correct there certainly seems to be a case for linking such behaviour with implicit religion, though of an immature and regressive kind. Margaret Rioch, who introduced the Tavistock model to the United States, made the connection more overt in a well-known paper published in 1971, "All we like sheep..." [Isa. 53.6]: Followers and Leaders'. The reference is to *dependency*, one of the Basic Assumptions that Bion claimed operated in groups, and which he saw as socially expressed in the religious institution.

Rioch's point is to highlight Isaiah's insight that 'leaders bear the iniquity and also the virtue of the group', or to put it in psychoanalytic terms, they tend to have the sins and the redemption of the group projected onto them. Of course, it need not be so. Indeed a major purpose of group dynamic work is to help people to become aware of and counteract the Basic Assumptions that are likely to hinder the mature completion of tasks in groups or organizations.

The Tavistock model is sometimes dismissed (unjustly, in my opinion) as authoritarian, thus allegedly positively encouraging dependency, but the same problem arises even in such apparently benevolent environments as Rogerian Groups. This was highlighted in a 1957 dialogue between Carl Rogers and Martin Buber that remains central to our understanding of the issue of authority in groups. Buber's point is that, however much facilitators of groups eschew leadership, their role ensures that it will be thrust upon them, especially if they have guru status like Rogers.

The point of this lengthy excursus on dependency is to question a comment made by Roger Grainger early on in his book that ‘workshops of this kind can easily be put together and certainly require no special training’. He also repeatedly remarks that the group is set up as a ‘safe place’. Well, one hopes so, and I am sure that with his wide experience Grainger’s workshops are just that. But I have seen too many cack-handed attempts at running groups to accept for a moment that they are always safe, or that just anybody can do this sort of thing.

After spending thirty years working in the field of group dynamics it will be obvious that I believe group work is very important and indeed has great relevance to spirituality. Working in the ‘here-and-now’ of the group is a potent, and therefore potentially extremely valuable, way of exploring one’s spiritual depths. It can also be, and too often has been, abusive, not necessarily through ill-will, but through ignorance. It is not for the ill-trained or the faint-hearted.

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