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Don S. Browning, David A. Clairmont, eds. *American Religions and the Family: How Faith Traditions Cope with Modernization and Democracy.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. vii + 258 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-13800-0.

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Faith in Uncertain Times

American Religions and the Family is a timely inquiry into the ways in which diverse religious groups in America deal with modernity's impact on traditions and the family. By surveying a large body of religious organizations, including the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Jewish Reform movement, and even the spiritual leanings of a variety of Native American tribes, the authors of this collection of essays cover a surprisingly broad range of both American cultures and their associated religious practices and denominations. Drawing on a diverse body of statistical evidence, scholarly religious journals, familial correspondences, and the document records of religious organizations, most of the book's authors firmly ground their arguments in a rich collection of sources, embracing the difficult demands of cultural history in a commendable fashion.

Organized around a series of fifteen loosely connected essays, this book attempts to survey the beliefs of the main religious groups in America while progressing thematically around notions of the family and its conflicts with the diverse aspects of modernity. These include political secularism and its interaction with an American religious majority, race relations, American consumer culture, and technological modernization. As each essay is written by a specialist of the particular culture or religion in question, the authors usually manage to avoid the pitfalls of generalization while conveying the inherent complexity of the interactions between tradition, religion, and modernity. In doing so, they unveil a web of power whose boundaries are neither clearly defined nor universally understood. This is true for most of the religions examined throughout the book, with particular distinctions and modern adaptations playing divisive roles between even the most conservative branches of Evangelical Christianity.

With the interplay between modernization and religion at the forefront of most chapters, many authors do a fine job tracing the evolution of particular faiths across the tumultuous social landscape of twentieth-century America. As many scholars point out in this collection of essays, not all members of a religion can be expected to blindly follow its doctrines, and as a result there emerges a variety of concessions and even crises among the numerous faiths of the United States. As W. Brad-

ford Wilcox and Elizabeth Williamson note in the case of Protestantism, which was the predominant American religious denomination for much of the twentieth century, there exists a persistent dilemma due to the progressive changes brought on by both feminism and other social movements of the 1960s: while many mainline Protestants still cling to the notion that strong families form the core of a healthy society, they acknowledge and often accept the predominantly modern rejection of strict 1950s familism, a belief system which had championed clearly demarcated lines of patriarchal power within a nuclear family (p. 40).

Similarly, the chapters on Native Americans and Hindu immigrants elucidate the ways in which certain non-European cultures use faith traditions to preserve their respective cultural identities in a manner vastly different from white Christians or African Americans, for example. In the case of the different tribes presented in Raymond Bucko's chapter, "Native American Families and Religion," traditional healing practices and the integrity of the extended family play a definitive role against what some Natives consider the perils of modernity; the historical memory of forced relocation and betrayal at the hands of the U.S. government has often disillusioned many tribes who are confronted with "Western progress" and the subsequent loss of tribal identities. According to Bucko some tribes denounce Western religious practices for perpetuating a backward image of their indigenous cultures, while others happily embrace syncretic blends of Native and Western theology in an attempt to accommodate both tradition and modern American life (p. 72).

For many Hindu families living in the United States, the ambiguous "modernity" is often viewed with suspicion due to its perceived power to corrupt youthful citizens with the allure of superficial wealth and promiscuity. Many immigrant Hindu parents fear the loss of familial respect by a younger generation growing up in America, especially when issues like dating, marriage, and religious devotion are raised.

While it is not directly addressed in each chapter, at the core of the book's argument lies the notion that religion is indeed under attack by the forces of modernity, and that this represents a moral setback in the eyes of the devout. This is stated most explicitly in David Dollahite's chapter, "Latter-day Saint Marriage and Family Life," with the author arguing that "Jesus taught his disciples to 'seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness' (Matt. 6:33), but modern secular, materialistic, and hedonistic culture urges adults and children, men and women to have it all right now"(p. 141).

This conflation of the perceived perils of contemporary American life is often defined as "modernity" in some of the book's chapters. In the case of Dollahite's essay the author tends to praise faith for the sake of tradition while often employing statistical evidence to back a priori assumptions about the inherent merit of traditional Mormon life. For, example, he takes pride in the fact that "Mormon teens are the most likely among all U.S. teens to hold religious beliefs similar to their parents" (p. 137). This is an interesting fact, but one of little significance if the issue at hand is moral virtue versus the perceived corrupting power of modernity. And while Dollahite does provide hard evidence like the lower risk of certain preventative illnesses due to Mormons' rules regarding substance use, it is a much more difficult and arguably impossible task to make a qualitative argument about personal moral integrity and other concepts like personal fulfillment based on Latter Day Saints' low divorce rates and high levels of "religiosity."

While modern American culture no doubt poses many challenges to religious traditions, absent from this collection of essays is a chapter devoted solely to secular humanism or a similar non-religious view of the family and democracy. While this is no doubt due to the book's strict focus on religion and its relationship with the broadly defined forces of modernization, this omission nevertheless reduces the scope of the argument to a simple dichotomy in many chapters, with modernity often portrayed as a intrusive cloud of hedonism and alienating consumer-culture ethics in an otherwise stable world of faith-based morality.

While this is not a major problem in an otherwise well-researched and solidly structured book, it does leave one with a slightly less comprehensive view of both the actors involved in the heated debates between American religious groups and the secular alternatives to faith-based conceptions of the modern life. As the diverse body of scholars within *American Religions and the Family* attempt to explore the complex ways in which representations of the family and religion have both evolved and adapted in an ever-changing world, this book should prove very useful not just to historians of religion, but to all who are concerned with the enormous influence of religion in the United States. By structuring the book in a comparative fashion, the editors demonstrate that modernity and faith are perceived in vastly different ways, among both cultural groups and the scholars who study them.

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