

legislatures. If the proliferation of the “Bible bills” that led to the elective courses described in Deckman’s and Prud’homme’s book can provide an indication of the speed with which this type of legislation can spread, it is likely that many more states will soon consider similar released time credit acts. Conservative Christians may find the generally secular, on-campus Bible electives less attractive than the overtly proselytizing and devotional (but nevertheless credit-bearing) evangelical released time courses. The inclusion of a deeper examination of the reconceptualized released time policies would have been an important addition to Deckman’s and Prud’homme’s book.

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THE DECONSTRUCTED CHURCH: UNDERSTANDING EMERGING CHRISTIANITY. By Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. xi + 268 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

While the Emergent Church Movement (ECM) has existed in some form for over 15 years, there have been few social scientists who have taken up the task of understanding the movement in earnest. *The Deconstructed Church* stands as a thorough and comprehensive execution of this difficult task. This work does a masterful job of describing coherently a religious phenomenon that denies a common theology, goes out of its way in resisting definition, and consistently affirms that it has no leadership structure.

The book is anchored in its thesis, “the ECM is a discernible, transnational group who share a religious orientation built on a continual practice of deconstruction” (p. 6). This thesis provides the backbone for each chapter as Marti and Ganiel document a group of individuals resisting previous religious structures to provide a safe haven for individuals disillusioned by traditional Christianity (both from mainline and evangelical traditions).

A good summary of the overall approach of the book can be found in Chapter 2, “Pluralist Congregations.” In it the authors provide a brief but comprehensive description of the

ECM as a religious movement that is focused on religious relativism, radical community, and equipping believers to live missional lives in their local community. What is particularly illuminating for new students to the movement is that the authors not only focus on how these principles attract individuals to join the ECM, but how some individuals have left the movement because of its values. For example, the authors note that the ECM is squarely focused on moral freedom and the belief that Christians should not be judging the behavior or beliefs of fellow Christians. On the other hand, they interview individuals who have left the ECM out of a belief that the church loved people too unconditionally and was afraid to enforce any sort of moral code.

One of the true strengths of this book is that it manages to avoid a number of pitfalls that could derail such an effort. Most notably, it does not spend too much time focusing on the postmodern philosophy that undergirds the ECM. While undoubtedly the works of Derrida and others are important to understanding how emergents view the idea of absolute truth, the focus of emergent Christianity is orthopraxy (right action) as opposed to orthodoxy (right belief). This focus on action is evidenced in the structure of the book, which devotes an entire chapter to “Following Jesus in the Real World,” a description of how emergents alter their politics, career choices, and lifestyles in order to more accurately reflect how they view religious devotion.

The Deconstructed Church does an excellent job of both introducing the ECM to those who are unfamiliar with the movement as well as providing insights to those who have been observing the movement for a longer period of time. The book spends an adequate number of pages defining the ECM in broad strokes, then drills down to describe the important nuances that exist in the movement. Another tremendous benefit to those who are not from a social science background is the writing style of the authors. Oftentimes, academics who study a popular culture movement fill pages with terse, scientific writing that is largely inaccessible to the average reader. However, I was delighted to see that Marti and Ganiel have an approach that is precise but accessible to a wider

audience. What aids this accessibility is a focus on interviews with people who are members of the ECM. While discussions of strategic religiosity and temporary autonomous zones are undoubtedly important from a social science perspective, reading direct quotes from emergents who discuss their desire to break away from previous forms of religiosity helps to ground abstract theory in concrete evidence.

The conclusion of the book wrestles with many of the major questions about the ECM, such as whether the movement is just repackaged liberal Christianity and whether the movement is dying. However, one of the questions that the authors do not address directly is: Why should the average person, or even average sociologist, care about the ECM? Scholars who study the movement will continue to wrestle with understanding the historical significance of the movement because it is unclear whether or not the movement will endure. In a radically changing religious landscape that is seeing the decline of the Religious Right and the rise of religious “nones,” Marti and Ganiel believe that the ECM is well positioned to provide an alternative for those who are considering leaving Christianity altogether. Up to this point, though, there has been little substantive evidence that the ECM has any ability to reverse the trend toward secularism in Western Christianity. That is not to say, however, that the ECM is not fertile ground for further inquiry. Thankfully, Marti and Ganiel offer a number of potential directions for researchers who are eager to focus on the ECM while at the same time providing a comprehensive snapshot of a religious movement at a critical moment.

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SACRED DIVORCE: RELIGION, THERAPEUTIC CULTURE, AND ENDING LIFE PARTNERSHIP. By Kathleen E. Jenkins. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. ix + 236 pp. \$80.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

Despite most religious traditions' promotion and sacralization of marriage, religious

individuals still divorce at rates similar to the national average. Yet even with researchers studying the relationship between religion and marital longevity, little scholarly attention has focused on the experiences of religious individuals who end what they had presumed to be life partnerships. Do religious individuals feel ostracized for not living up to this cherished religious ideal or do they find support and solace within their faith communities? Additionally, how do religious leaders counsel their congregants without destabilizing the esteemed position of marriage within their communities? In answering these questions, Kathleen Jenkins's book, *Sacred Divorce: Religion, Therapeutic Culture, and Ending Life Partnership*, offers a remarkable work of cultural sociology that reveals how religious efforts to sacralize divorce reflect broader cultural tensions about individualism within religion and marriage. In documenting a “religion of recovery,” she exposes how an omnipresent therapeutic culture permeates the self-work individuals do after a divorce. Through this process, individuals seek resources from their religious faiths in order to become better people of faith, better parents, and to prepare for the lifetime relationship they hope is in their future.

Jenkins draws on an impressive qualitative study that samples people from a notable diversity of religious traditions including variation along the lines of race-ethnicity, social class, and the acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships. Most of the book focuses on the experiences of 75 religious people who had experienced separation or divorce, ranging from those who separated as recently as a few months prior to the study to those that had divorced more than 20 years ago. While the breadth of data is admirable, the real strength of her qualitative study lies in the powerful and emotionally moving manner in which she provides a voice to this often voiceless population. As I read the book, I frequently became engrossed in people's narratives of negotiating social shame and their heartfelt searches within their religious traditions for tools to help cope with the powerful emotions. By subtly inserting her own feelings and reactions to hearing these stories during the interviews, Jenkins skillfully creates a powerful ethnographic writing style that allowed me