

Book Reviews

Theology, Music, and Modernity: Struggles for Freedom

Jeremy Begbie, Daniel K. L. Chua, and Markus Rathey, eds.

Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

2021, 400 pp., hardcover, \$115.00

ISBN: 978-0198846550

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

Theology, Music, and Modernity (TMM) is a series of conversations at the confluence of culture and theory, abstract ideals and physical realities, historical quests for understanding and detailed interpretations of musical passages. As a book, it is a sort of polymath playground, where disciplines merge and overlap. The articles themselves also have this feeling, as the authors are aware of the other articles, and there is real interaction from one piece to the next.

The boundaries of this conversation, though, are the first thing a reader should consider. While the above paragraph may sound very raucous and free, the themes provide constraints on the conversation. The articles take place at the intersection of (Christian) theology, music, and the cultural experience of modernity, specifically the development of modernity's concept of freedom. The era in focus is 1740-1850 (p. 5). So, this is not a broad exploration of music in general, but a focused discussion mostly covering European, classical music. Beethoven, Bach, Mendelssohn, and Haydn are studied alongside philosophers like Kant, Hegel, and Herder in the bulk of the text. This is predictable, perhaps, given the narrow space opened by the initial parameters. Those hoping for forays into the rest of the globe or theological connections with genres like country or hip-hop should probably look elsewhere.

However, the exception to this Eurocentrism occurs in the third of the four main parts. Here there is a recognition that the discussions of freedom that are occurring in Europe are happening concurrently with an

era of colonialism and slavery. The text moves across the Atlantic to follow the life of Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This section is well done and looks at the life of Allen alongside the successive hymnals published during his leadership. The theme of freedom is developed through these essays also, but the shape of the concept of freedom for Beethoven's listeners and for Allen's congregations is obviously very different.

In a book on music, theology, and a narrow cultural era, a book that moves back and forth from St. Paul to music theory to art interpretation to philosophy, I found myself asking what this work does best. Though it was interesting looking at theology through conceptual lenses provided by music or tracing out again Pauline concepts of freedom versus modern ones, those discussions, while erudite and well-sourced, did not strike me as groundbreaking. The essays exploring Herder, language, and music in the last section pose curious questions about the relationship between language and music, and the contrast between the two. However, in my opinion, of the disciplines through which this book is roaming, it is at its best when it is doing history. The life of Richard Allen and Felix Mendelssohn, outlining the contours of the concept of freedom by looking at artifacts like paintings and scores, elaborating on the movement of Bach's music from the church to the concert hall: these are the places where *TMM* shines. I do not come away feeling as though I have met a challenging new theological concept or found a breathtaking interpretation of Beethoven's *Eroica*, but I do feel that I have gained some quality historical context and insight into this era that I did not have before.

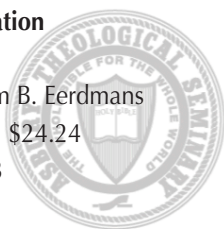
Paul's Three Paths to Salvation

Gabriele Boccaccini

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans

2020, 180 pp., hardcover, \$24.24

ISBN: 978-0-8028-3921-3



Reviewed by Alberto I. Bonilla-Giovanetti

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Gabriele Boccaccini's *Paul's Three Paths to Salvation* seeks to situate the apostle Paul within his heavily apocalyptic Jewish worldview in order to best understand the apostle's soteriology.

The book is divided into a foreword, a preface, and nine chapters. David Bentley Hart states in his foreword that he admires Boccaccini's attempt at contextualizing Paul in his apocalyptic Jewish context, which focuses on Christ's salvific work that accomplishes the defeat of evil spiritual powers, instead of focusing on later controversies about justification and righteousness in the Protestant Reformation (xii–xiii). Boccaccini's preface gives a brief synopsis of his intellectual journey toward this book, where he sees a turning point in his understanding of Paul when he “began to realize that Paul's message of justification by faith was not addressed indiscriminately to all (Jews and gentiles alike), nor exclusively to gentiles but specifically to the many—the sinners (Jews and gentiles alike)” (xviii).

Chapter 1 addresses the controversy of whether Paul remained a Jew or if he became a Christian. Here the author gives a brief history of research of Paul's relationship to Judaism, weaving his thoughts with his account of various important researchers views on this issue. The main schools of thought addressed in this chapter include a Lutheran view, an apocalyptic view, the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), and the Paul-within-Judaism view. Even though Boccaccini strongly sympathizes with the Paul-within-Judaism approach, he seeks to nuance his views, recognizing that “[t]he real Paul belongs neither exclusively to Judaism nor solely to Christianity but rather to the diversity of the Second Temple as one of its most radical and distinctive components” (23).

Chapter 2 addresses the controversial question within Pauline studies of whether Paul converted to Christianity. Boccaccini then recounts the process of gentile proselytism into Judaism, the debates in Second Temple Judaism on apostasy, and argues that Paul's situation is to be understood as an issue within Judaism, not the initial stage of the “parting of the ways” (34). Because of this, Boccaccini sides with those who posit that Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was a call within Judaism (i.e., change in party from Pharisaism to the Jesus Movement), not a conversion to Christianity (38).

Chapter 3 revolves around Jewish apocalyptic literature and its relationship to Paul. In this chapter, Boccaccini first recounts how certain scholars, such as R.H. Charles, Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Bultmann, and John Collins address apocalyptic views in their different contexts. Secondly, Boccaccini addresses the apocalyptic worldview itself, noting that the question of evil was central to this worldview. He notes that “in apocalyptic circles many viewed the origin of evil not as a consequence of God's will

or human transgression but as a rebellion of superhuman angelic powers." The author notes how different streams of Judaism respond to this question, citing primary sources, such as 1 Enoch, Jubilees, Daniel, and Qumran literature, and how these sources relate evil, angelic beings, and adherence to Torah. These issues are related to Paul in that they "are subordinated to Paul's central apocalyptic idea of the superhuman origin of evil, including the problem of personal salvation, the inclusion of non-Jews, and the relevance of the Mosaic torah" (54).

Chapter 4 addresses Jewish messianism. Boccaccini surveys two main versions of the Messiah, the "Son of David," and the "Son of Man." On the one hand, the "Son of David" was viewed as a more political and military idea that focused on the monarchy and on adherence to Torah (61). The messianic "Son of Man," on the other hand, was viewed as being focused on supernatural liberation, not only socio-political freedom. Based on 1 Enoch, the "Son of Man" was "[c]reated at the beginning of the first creation before the angelic hosts, [...] is a preexistent, superhuman being, destined to remain 'hidden' until his glorious manifestation" (64). Despite having a minimalist view of the reliability of the Gospels to know the historical Jesus's self-understanding, Boccaccini argues that Mark asserts that Jesus had an Enochic view of the messiah via the "Son of Man." Thus, in the author's view, the early church "understood Jesus in apocalyptic terms. He was the Son of Man, the final judge and destroyer of evil at the end of time" (67).

Chapter 5 views forgiveness eschatologically and apocalyptically through an Enochic lens. Here Boccaccini argues that, based on 1 Enoch 50, "repentance at the time of the last judgment will cause God to forgive some sinners by mercy" (71), which is different than salvation through following Torah that was common in Second Temple Judaism. This text provides an apocalyptic and eschatological precursor to John the Baptist's preaching of repentance, since Boccaccini argues that this apocalyptic tradition sustained that God's judgment was imminent, but his mercy was available to sinners who repented (77). This is then ultimately taken up by Jesus himself in the Synoptic tradition, who is portrayed as the forgiving messiah who, by his death, would forgive the "many" who are sinners (81). Thus, in agreement with the apocalyptic and eschatological views of the early Jesus movement, Paul proclaims this same message of Jesus's forgiving sacrifice to the many sinners who repent before the eschaton (89).

Chapter 6 addresses the Jewish background to Paul's Christology. The author surveys modern scholarship on low and high Christology, especially the works of Bart Ehrman and Larry Hurtado, as well as the complex world of Jewish monotheism. For Boccaccini, the most important question regarding the evolution of Christology is not when Jesus was regarded as divine (cf. Ehrman) or when he was venerated/worshipped (cf. Hurtado), but rather when Jesus was regarded as uncreated (97). On this issue, the author argues that Paul and the Synoptics are in broad agreement on Christology, with the Pauline distinctives of an Adam parallelism and his focus on the sacrifice of Jesus for forgiveness of sins. This would be to highlight Paul's apocalyptic bent in his Christology (104).

Chapter 7 differentiates justification and salvation in Paul's theology. Boccaccini sustains that both Augustine and Luther conflated both justification and salvation, thus leading later theologians and scholars to make anachronistic arguments regarding Paul's soteriology. For Boccaccini, as argued throughout the book, it is best to interpret Paul's soteriology through an apocalyptic lens. Paul's apocalyptic lens (cf. Enoch's *Book of Parables*) claims that humanity is under the powers of evil spirits and are thus unable to be free from sin on their own, therefore needing Christ's salvation. Boccaccini, however, differentiates who exactly needs salvation. He says that justification is God's forgiveness of past sins that humanity suffered under the rule of evil powers, but after that, everyone is judged and saved according to their works (122). So, in his view, Boccaccini argues that by separating justification and salvation interpreters are able to separate Paul from Augustine and Luther and read him in his Second Temple apocalyptic environment.

Chapter 8 addresses Paul's role as apostle in the nations. Boccaccini briefly surveys Jewish (especially Hellenistic) views on proselytes and God-fearers before delving into how the early Jesus movement handled Gentiles. Boccaccini emphasizes the "slavery" motif regarding sin to explain that, in an apocalyptic view, both Jews and Gentiles are in a "postwar scenario" where they are enslaved to sin and the evil spiritual powers because Adam and Eve lost their war against them (142–43). They are then justified from this, being made free from their slavery and made one with Christ and each other. How this relates to early ecclesiology is then the difficult thing. In Boccaccini's view, the already/not yet reality is made evident in ecclesiology, where followers of Jesus are "[m]ade mystically equal 'in Christ' (but not yet

equal in this world), they should live in this world in harmony and mutual love (but not in equality), according to their own distinct identities" (155). The fullness of the believer's status in Christ would be fulfilled in the world to come, not on this one.

Chapter 9 summarizes the main points of Boccaccini's book, especially on Paul's apocalyptic worldview, the misreading of Augustine and Luther on justification, and then suggests some ideas for implications in Christian theology and interreligious dialogue, especially with Jews. Thus, Boccaccini argues that "In Paul's view, Christ is God's gift not to all but to the many—the sinners" (162). So, the implications for Boccaccini are that Jews are saved by following Torah, Gentiles are saved by following the natural law of their conscience, and sinners (whether Jews or Gentiles) are justified (i.e., forgiven) by the eschatological gift of Christ, which puts them on the path to good works and salvation.

Gabriele Boccaccini's work certainly makes one think about Paul, his context, and how understanding his letters shape our theology and praxis for today. The fact that some of his views would be controversial to many should not deter one to engage with his ideas and accept or push back where necessary. His strong insistence on situating Paul within his Jewish context is key, and his support of reading him through an apocalyptic lens is correct. How this applies to specific instances in the Pauline corpus, such as issues of Christology or the relationship of justification and salvation, may be debated, however. This last point should surely prompt theological students, both beginners and those with experience, to revisit some of the basic claims of Protestant soteriology and compare them with Boccaccini's reading of Paul. Furthermore, Boccaccini's writing style is clear and concise, which invites a wide audience to partake of the discussion. His findings would surely instigate responses from other Pauline scholars, yet his book was written so that any curious reader of Paul may benefit from his research. Considering that *Paul's Three Paths to Salvation* is clearly written, yet arrives at innovative conclusions, this book is one that should be read by a wide audience. This is especially true considering that one of Boccaccini's own purposes for his book is to bridge gaps in interreligious dialogue. As said before, not everyone will agree with all of Boccaccini's arguments, but every thoughtful reader should find something stimulating to consider and discuss for a long time.

Paul & the Power of Grace

John M.G. Barclay

Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans

2020, 200 pp., paperback, \$22.00

ISBN: 978-0-8028-7461-0

Reviewed by Matthew R. Peterson

John M.G. Barclay's 2015 book *Paul and the Gift* has been hailed by many New Testament scholars as a landmark development on the topic of grace in the writings of Paul. Through his new book *Paul & the Power of Grace*, Barclay offers a summary (and partial expansion) of the arguments from that earlier work for readers who might have been intimidated by its size and abundance of technical data.

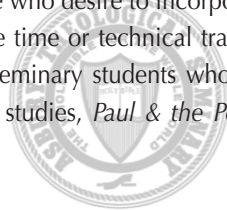
Those who have read *Paul and the Gift* will be familiar with the general arguments that make up the majority of this new book. The first three chapters provide a brief orientation to ancient Mediterranean gift-giving customs. Barclay demonstrates how ancient assumptions contrast (sometimes starkly) with the modern western notion that "pure" gifts ought to be non-reciprocal and disinterested. References to ancient philosophers and moralists undergird Barclay's taxonomy of six ancient "perfections" of gift-giving: superabundance, singularity, priority, incongruity, efficacy and noncircularity. This taxonomy is used to provide specification on grace language in a variety of Second Temple Jewish works, and in so doing modifies the work of New Perspective scholars like E.P. Sanders. The gift-giving taxonomy is also employed later in the book to lend precision for Barclay's analysis of how Paul uses grace terminology in his letters, especially Galatians and Romans.

Barclay's analysis suggests that the "grammar" of Paul's theology is oriented towards grace as the incongruous favor of God that is intended to establish a reciprocal relationship between God and the believer. He argues that Protestant debates concerning the status of ethical obligations ("works") in Paul largely stem from imprecision in how the various shades of grace in Paul's letters are understood. Specifically, he observes a tendency to confuse incongruity with noncircularity. For Barclay, Paul's wrestling with the Christ event and responses to that event from Jews and Gentiles are most profitably seen through the lens of incongruity. Any

other “perfections” operate at a secondary basis. The incongruous gift of Jesus Christ upset ancient conceptions of worth. A disruption of traditional assumptions concerning the worthiness of recipients then molded Paul’s contextualized theology found in his letters.

Later chapters interact with other prevailing views on Paul, draw implications of Barclay’s work for Christian communities, and (briefly) address how grace language is employed in the disputed and non-Pauline letters. Despite the limited scope that a book of this size affords, Barclay successfully summarizes several major areas of contention in Pauline studies (most specifically regarding Galatians and Romans). His concise discussions of key passages in the letters should prove helpful for readers who might not be fully versed in recent trends in Pauline studies. Barclay’s reflections on community application, while brief, draw the work out of the theoretical realm by delving into the pastoral implications of God’s incongruous yet circular grace. Such a pastoral focus is a fitting conclusion to the work given its intended audience.

Although a substantial amount of detail found in *Paul and the Gift* has been omitted in pursuit of a shorter format, *Paul & the Power of Grace* retains the major points and several minor nuances from that larger work quite well, which is a remarkable accomplishment. For those who have already read *Paul and the Gift*, this new book can serve as a helpful summary that offers some intriguing (albeit minor) additional reflections. Barclay’s writing style is, as always, a treat that successfully traverses the narrow bridge between erudition and approachability. Such a balance is especially appreciated given the intent of this work to engage additional (non-academic) readers. Readers who wish to engage with a thorough exegesis of the pivotal passages would do well to pick up the larger *Paul and the Gift*. But for those who desire to incorporate Barclay’s findings into their ministry yet lack the time or technical training to work through that book, or for college or seminary students who are less familiar with the current scope of Pauline studies, *Paul & the Power of Grace* is perfectly targeted.



After Nationalism: Being American in an Age of Division

Samuel Goldman

Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press

2021, 208 pp., hardcover, \$24.95

ISBN: 978-0812251647

Reviewed by Zach Jeffcoat

After Nationalism conjured up an old memory of mine – one from preschool. My first memories of school are of saying the Pledge of Allegiance to the American and Christian flags at a private religious school. With time, this ritual has become increasingly strange to me. Realizing I had no sense of their continuity, it seems that I merely assented to them as normal goods. Dr. Samuel Goldman analyzes the national symbols that US citizens often mistake for commonly held ideas and sentiments.

In *After Nationalism*, Dr. Goldman uses a rough set of ideal types to describe historical conceptions of the American nation: the covenant, creed, and crucible. First, the covenant symbolized “a special relationship between the English settlers of the Atlantic Coast and the God of [Abraham].” Next, creedal nationalism defines America by “the correspondence between its institutions [and] universal ideals” -- like individual rights. Last, the crucible borrows Americanness as an *eventuality* in the oft-cited melting pot analogy (2). In the second to last chapter, Dr. Goldman uses another mnemonic -- memory, nostalgia, narrative -- to describe the different moods of historiography. Finally, Goldman explains how his title functions as an allusion *and* a thesis. *After Nationalism* is a play on the title *After Virtue* (by Alasdair MacIntyre). As MacIntyre argued concerning virtue, Goldman argues that a “shared vocabulary” belies a “long-running dispute about their [actual] content” (118). In short, he argues that stronger, more coherent institutions will be best for sustaining the Union amid a “cacophony” of national ideas (119).

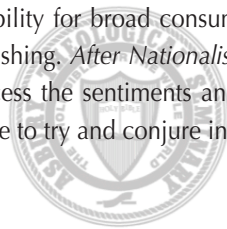
Dr. Goldman’s framework is ready for application in discussions among Christian scholars and laypeople alike because its familiar terminology can be related to traditional conceptions of Christian [communitarianism/commonality]. Most obviously, the concept of covenant is richly laid out through scripture and thoroughly explored within the tradition. Next, the Book of Galatians -- with particular attention to 3:28 and its context

(“neither Jew nor gentile [...] you are all one in Christ.”) -- can be put into robust dialogue with Goldman’s exploration of crucible and melting pot nationalism. Then, most creatively, naming “creedal nationalism” in a discussion can help to highlight political nuances in discussions of creedal and confessional orders of Christianity.

Apart from its orthodox institutionalism, Goldman’s conclusions could be characterized as *lasses-faire* or typical-libertarian. While I agree that stately pluralism might be the best potential outcome “after nationalism,” I question whether anyone wants to see that come about. For example, much of the gridlock surrounding federal policies could be easily resolved by empowering state governments to make and enforce *different* laws, but there are two major drawbacks. First, states have not always had a good record of governance. Second, I would suggest that -- in the absence of major reforms -- only wealthy citizens would be able or likely to move to a state whose governance they prefer. With so many landlocked minorities, federalism (and, with it, nationalism) will tend to remain strong. That said, the relationships between geography and belief are worth discussing at length.

As one of Max Weber’s fanboys, I cannot help but include him in my analysis. His work on the confluence of nationalism, traditionalism, and Protestantism is relevant to the American spirit. In particular, I feel that Weber’s work demonstrates how rationalized forms of sectarianism can be almost *supernaturally* effective in producing social change but, without proper checks and balances, can become cancerous towards the same ends.

All things considered, Dr. Goldman’s *After Nationalism* is an eloquent brief on the belief in and interpretation of United States’ national history. Its suitability for broad consumption is only matched by the timeliness of its publishing. *After Nationalism* could be a crucial read for those looking to process the sentiments and ideas that the upcoming midterm elections are sure to try and conjure in us all.



Abject Joy: Paul, Prison, and the Art of Making Do

Ryan S. Schellenberg

New York, NY: Oxford University Press

2021, 248 pp., hardcover, \$74.00

ISBN-13: 978-0190065515

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

Page after page, *Abject Joy* is an insightful, thought-provoking book. While there will be plenty to discuss, develop, and disagree with in this well-researched monograph, it is a work that opens new possibilities and propels the conversation in new directions. That can be a very difficult thing to do in biblical studies, especially in trying to shed new light on the Pauline texts. From the beginning, though, Schellenberg takes a novel angle and plunges into the prison experience of St. Paul.

The methodology at work is to take seriously what we know of the physical, social, and psychological effects of prison isolation and deprivation in recent studies, and to lay those realities alongside extra-biblical evidence from Paul's era. All of this is done with an eye on the Pauline texts, looking for places where the interpretations that grew up around Paul may be romanticizing or heroizing the realities that he faced. The reader is asked to revisit seemingly basic questions once again: Who is this Paul, and how does he describe his own experience? What does it mean to write about "joy" from prison?

Densely researched throughout, Schellenberg takes the reader on a tour of ancient sources from various strata of the Greco-Roman world. We are invited to try on different interpretations of Paul as contemporary letters, reports, and narratives are unfolded in front of us. Does the language of Stoicism really fit as a parallel for Paul's language? Is Paul facing prison like a noble or like someone without any status in society? At the same time, Schellenberg details analogous situations and experiences of prison life from recent studies, guiding the reader through ethnographic evidence that questions the more idealistic, hagiographic descriptions of Paul's ordeal. Sociological study is brought to bear in an attempt to identify some of the shared human features of being an imprisoned person in any time period.

Of course, Schellenberg is also providing an interpretation, but it is a position richly supported by ancient extra-biblical textual evidence

seen through the lens of the lived realities of incarcerated persons, which calls us back to the biblical text once again to reevaluate and refresh our understandings. While he is careful to note the differences between modern prison experiences and ancient ones and is wary of over-psychologizing Paul, he does believe that carefully considering the accounts of imprisoned people from ancient and modern times can bring us closer to understanding the meaning of the “joy” that Paul is writing about in correspondence with Christians on the outside. Whether or not one agrees with the directions Schellenberg takes the evidence, he does a great service by shaking entrenched and seemingly self-evident interpretations of the Pauline epistles without being baldly controversial.

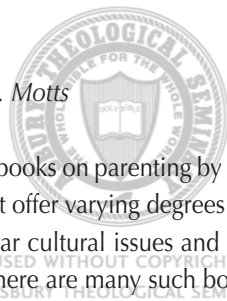
It was also enjoyable to watch the way the methodology and argumentation develops throughout *Object Joy*. For a biblical studies student looking for inspiration on how to approach research on the well-worn and heavily debated passages of the Bible, there is much to learn here. Tomes about the Apostle Paul pile up, but this monograph of modest length is one that is worth taking note of and discussing. I look forward to future offerings from Schellenberg and hope to see more monographs in this general vein of biblical scholarship. A recommended read for Pauline scholars and students alike.

Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation

Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk
New York, NY: Oxford University Press
2020, 258 pp., ebook, \$9.99
ISBN: 978-0190093358

Reviewed by Zachariah S. Motts

There are many books on parenting by religious parenting gurus of one type or another. Most offer varying degrees of well-meaning advice on how to deal with particular cultural issues and parent in a manner faithful to one’s faith tradition. There are many such books on the market, but this is not one of those books. This is a work of original research in conversation with other research on parenting that attempts to understand the reality of religious parenting and religious transmission in the United States. Rather



than give advice on how parenting should happen, *Handing Down the Faith* is a sociological study that attempts to listen carefully to American parents.

In that way, it is a descriptive rather than a prescriptive work. The authors lean heavily on field work, questionnaires, and, especially, interviews of American parents to paint a picture of attitudes toward parenting and the outcomes of those attitudes. Their team conducted 235 interviews of 150 households from a spectrum of American religious adherents: “white evangelicals, white mainline Protestants, black Protestants, white Catholics, Hispanic Catholics, Mormons, Conservative Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus” along with “a sample of non-religious parents for comparative purposes” (227). So, though the authors admit that the sample and the topics of some of the interview questions tended to skew Christian, voices of parents from other religious traditions feature prominently throughout the work.

Voices of American parents are the focus of Smith and Adamczyk’s study. They give space to allow parents to describe their own understanding of religious parenting in order to illustrate better the cultural and conceptual world in which these people are moving and raising their children. Their words have been carefully transcribed, coded, and placed alongside the results of other surveys in ways that provide deeper insight into those statistics. This work is a partial contribution to a larger conversation, and the authors are careful in their interpretations to not draw overly broad conclusions about religious transmission. Even so, they are able to point out some thought-provoking features of the sociological landscape of American religious parenting and the self-understandings of those parents.

Obviously, as with any study of this type, it provides a snapshot of the past. Though recently published, the bulk of the research occurred between 2015 and 2016. There are times that the concerns of the text do seem dated after the boiling interactions between religion, politics, immigration, racial discrimination, and public health over the past few years. I was struck at one point by comments concerning perceptions of racial discrimination in schools by Asian-American parents which seemed very disparate from where the conversation is today. One cannot help but wonder how different these interviews would have gone today, and how these major events, like the closing of places of worship because of COVID-19, is affecting religious transmission today.

Those limitations, though, are not as much a criticism of what Smith and Adamczyk have created here as a call for continuing research.

If this work was revised and expanded in the future to cover the last few years, I would happily revisit and reread. Their methods are conscientious and their contribution to the understanding of American religious life is meaningful, so I would like to see further books in this vein. Though there are unavoidable limitations, in *Handing Down the Faith*, the authors have done their work well enough that I find myself asking for more.



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