expressed in all three churches was that they see themselves as “one generation from extinction” (206). In other words, their children must be a big focus of their ministries, as their religious culture will not continue otherwise.

Some of the more provocative contextual elements mentioned by Strhan include theological and ideological disputes about the nature of children as pure or sinful, the role of religion in society as useful or toxic, and how these come together in understandings of sexuality and sex education for children. For example, if children are pure, their agency could be vulnerable to religious coercion or sexual abuse. Alternatively, if they are sinful, their will must be squelched and their agency thereby redirected. Strhan delineates how these opposing views are managed in the three churches, and how children respond to each kind of treatment. In addition to differences, there are some important commonalities as well: they all see themselves as providing hope to a world in need, and working toward a better future, both for their own members and their communities, to differing degrees. For all of them, that involves the intentional formation of their own children as Christian partners, while also reaching out to their communities with programs marked by varying levels of service, activism, and for some, conversion. Adult evangelicals navigate these complicated contexts while interacting with children who are also experiencing larger social forces—varied educational settings and increasingly diverse friends, to name just two.

The complexity of the social contexts described by Strhan includes other elements as well, such as changing ideas about gender, as some evangelicals struggle with more traditional models of male headship. She also found differing ideas about parenting expertise. While some prefer stricter disciplinary guidelines such as those promulgated by Focus on the Family (minus the corporal punishment, more common in the United States), others prefer “Messy” church programs, where families are encouraged to run around and enjoy each other and the church as fun and spontaneous. One important commonality is that all three congregations see themselves as countercultural, which can make serving the community and attracting new members challenging.

A wide variety of theoretical references are scattered through the text. I was especially intrigued to think further about Bourdieu’s idea of habitus in settings of religious formation, the impact of Weber’s Protestant Ethic in the religious educational programs for children in poverty, and the effectiveness of Foucauldian self-surveillance, taught to children as a kind of Christian reflexivity. These and many others were suggested, but too briefly. Any one of them might have made for a more robust analytical focus.

Overall, Strhan provides a novel, child-focused perspective on evangelicals, using captivating ethnographic description in an equally scholarly and accessible narrative. This book is fun to read; it also makes you think—a lovely combination. The only disappointment was the sprinkling of tempting theoretical sideroads, while lacking adequate depth in any one of them. Readers will have to do some of that work for themselves, but it will be work worth doing.

Gail Murphy-Geiss
Colorado College
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In their study of a dozen American megachurches, Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly re-introduce emotion into the
sociological study of religion and the growth of new religious forms. The core of the book is an extended and very complete application of Randall Collins’ theory of interaction ritual chains. The empirical analysis is bracketed by an ambitious opening six chapters that lay out Collins’ theory and Durkheim’s sociological notion of Homo Duplex (that humans wish to be unique autonomous beings but must accomplish this in community), a discussion of ritual and emotions, a summary of the history of megachurches, and then a short concluding section that offers both a critique and a defense of megachurches.

In the opening chapters, the authors introduce the key theoretical concepts and the analytic metaphor they use throughout the text—religion as an addictive drug. The main argument presented in the opening three chapters is that megachurches are an incredibly efficient type of organization for creating and recreating intense emotional experiences through ritual. They thus build solidarity and community, which is at the core of Durkheim’s sociology of religion. Megachurch rituals build commitment to the religion and solidarity among participants in ways that small churches cannot because of the size and intensity of the emotions evoked during a worship service. The authors argue a “somatic marker hypothesis” (i.e., intense, positive emotions are connected to and derived from particular types of religious experiences, see pp. 10–11), with interaction ritual chain theory and insights from microsociology to build their theoretical argument. The remaining chapters (5–6) in Section 1 provide a brief history of megachurches and congregational life in America.

Each chapter in Section 2 (7–13) is devoted to one step of the interaction ritual chain argument (see figure 7.1, p. 83 for schematic representation of the argument). The authors draw on survey and focus group data with members of 12 megachurches and interviews with clergy to show how megachurch leaders create an environment and a set of emotion-laden interactions in worship and small group activities (from Bible studies to charitable works) that pull visitors in and keep them coming back. They summarize their argument when they write: “the joy and ‘wow’ of their services can only be experienced in person, as the crowd and its emotion create its own sense of urgency that something is happening here that happens nowhere else.” (109)

The strength of the book is in its extended and thoughtful application of interaction ritual chain theory. However, the book does not break new ground. Much of what we learn about the megachurches has been articulated in a variety of scholarly works by social scientists (see the work of Scott Thumma, Kimon Howland Sargeant, Nancy Eiseland, and/or Anne Loveland and Otis Wheeler). They largely reach the shared conclusions about megachurch development and growth: the large size makes it possible to engender collective effervescence and marshal resources to make the church a total institution. Unlike smaller churches, worship is fun and emotionally fulfilling akin to the kinds of joy and excitement engendered by attending a large concert or sporting event; the size allows for free riders while also catering to the niche needs of just about every interest group imaginable. In short, Wellman and his colleagues do not engage the extant megachurch literature in any systematic or sustained way and thus make it difficult to discern what is novel about their research.

Another concern I have with the book is that the authors tend to take an uncritical approach to megachurches insofar as they present them as unique religious powerhouses whose clergy preach relevant biblical sermons, whose worship rituals always produce collective effervescence, whose members are engaged in world-saving charitable missions, and whose collective life is far superior in terms of fomenting community and connectedness. Small churches as well as non-evangelical, old Mainline, and Liberal protestant congregations do all of these things and may do them as well but simply not on the same scale. And the implicit comparison between the failing small churches participants once attended and their megachurch, often
voiced by participants, is not interrogated or questioned by the authors.

A third limitation of the book lies in its analysis. The authors have data on 12 megachurches, some 24,000 survey respondents, and a few hundred focus group interviewees, yet there is no variation. The churches appear to operate in the same way despite differences in size, racial composition, denominational affiliation, region, or founding date. Prior studies have shown that some of these organizational characteristics yield important differences, but there appear to be none in this study. Why is this? The authors offer no explanation about why there appears to be no variation in the practices or degrees of success of these 12 congregations. Finally, the book does not read as a fully integrated piece. In particular, the chapter about megachurch scandals is not based on data from the congregations in the study, but from a content analysis of news reports. While the analysis itself is interesting to read, it does not contribute to or advance their explanation of megachurch success, so it is a bit difficult to understand why it is included.

Overall, High on God reminds us about the importance of paying greater attention to the roles of emotions and ritual in explaining the emergence, growth, and even failure of religious organizational forms.

Stephen Ellingson
Hamilton College
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Atalia Omer’s Days of Awe is an important book that considers how Palestinian suffering has led left-leaning American Jews to develop a non-Zionist and anti-Zionist activism and to reconsider their Jewish identity.

The book’s opening chapters examine the causes and current status of Jewish activism. Omer argues that Jewish activism is a response to Palestinian suffering; a rebellion from a dominant narrative of Israel as victim and savior of the Jewish people; and a mutiny against mainstream Jewish organizations such as AIPAC that maintain and police that narrative.

Next, Omer examines the process of self-reflection and transformation in Jewish activist organizations. Israel’s strategic and military actions in the territories and Omer compels Jewish activists to challenge Israel’s narrative of victim that can do no unjustifiable harm because of its fight for survival; and an American Jewish mainstream whose discourse and actions enable and justify Israel’s actions. In response, Jewish activists have adopted a Judaism that is “antimilitarist, spiritual, ethical, un-chosen, diasporist, multiracial, and postnationalist” (11).

The final step in the argument explores how debates about Jewishness also result from “an intersectional scrutiny of American race history and the participation of (some) Jews in white privilege and the apparatuses of white supremacy, on the one hand, with a collaborative, comprehensive, and multidimensional examination of anti-Semitism, on the other” (11). This part of the book jumps back and forth between the descriptive and the prescriptive. For instance, she observes that American Jewish activists see the importance of recognizing Jewish and white privilege, and suggests that Jews should change their place on the pinwheel from white to people of color because this would lead to more progressive values.

There also is an interesting discussion of the rise of African-American and Palestinian solidarity, which according to Omer, forces American Jews to re-examine the cherished myth of their longstanding support for civil rights and recognize how Israel symbolizes oppression and American imperialism for many African-Americans.