acknowledge that the religious culture of a country matters in determining its speed and path of secularization, Norris and Inglehart construe religion as being primarily reactive, as expressing anxiety but not creativity. Yet, the main patrons of the myriad of Hindu temples sprouting throughout the U.S., Canada and England are not poor immigrants, but successful surgeons, entrepreneurs and software engineers who want to pass their culture on to their children. In the process, they re-imagine a primordial Hinduism in diaspora and within India.

The activities of transnational actors point to Sacred and Secular’s third limitation. Although they globalize the secularization debate, Norris and Inglehart still rely on a methodological nationalism that does not allow them to factor in the impact of new communication and transportation technologies that have made possible the spread of certain religions. Religions that strike a balance between vertical and horizontal integration, between compelling messages of personal salvation and global missionary zeal, and between traditionalism and modernity appear better equipped to successfully negotiate global media and information flows. In other words, the persistence of religion may not just be the result of widespread existential insecurity. The internal dynamics of religion, in interplay with technological changes, may also determine the kind of religion that is visible today. Norris and Inglehart’s methodological nationalism may be unavoidable given the data bases available. However, nation states are increasingly embedded in crisscrossing transnational and virtual networks that have fostered movements as diverse as Neo-Shamanism, Hindutva, Falun Gong, Tablighi Jamaat and Al Qaeda.

Despite these weaknesses, Sacred and Secular is essential reading for anyone interested in religion and social change. It may not resolve all the conundrums of religion today, but it shows that secularization is a general, long-term tendency in which regional, national and local variations are embedded. If this is the case, rather than looking for a teleological metanarrative, we need to assess how secularization, the religious toolkits available, the creativity of religious producers and consumers, and globalization interact in particular settings to produce converging or diverging patterns. Sacred and Secular’s most enduring impact might be to point us in the direction of a robust methodological pluralism.

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Feminism has long been entranced by women who do not follow its calls for liberation, self-realization, and social change. Conservative and religious women, many of whom actively oppose feminism, have been objects of choice to scholars attempting to evaluate why feminist gains have been less extensive than hoped. Much of this scholarship, while important, has succumbed to the temptation to interpret these women in feminist terms, attempting to demonstrate the unseen liberatory possibilities that exist in conservative religious communities and the seemingly paradoxical ways they facilitate women’s agency. Few have developed the critical tools that allow the practices of conservative women to challenge the feminist project in a substantive way and to re-think that project’s foundations as a result.

Politics of Piety is an important step in that direction. The book is an ethnographic exploration of the women’s mosque movement in Egypt, an aspect of Islamic
revival that has enabled women both to
learn and to teach Islamic practices of
teaching the country. The movement
emerged as part of a religious chal-
lenge to an increasingly westernized, secu-
larized Egyptian culture and, while it does
not make direct political claims against the
state, its aims of inculcating the practices of
piety (da’wa) and the large audiences some
women teachers (da’iya) have attracted has
brought it repressive attention from the
government. Mahmood’s work is based on
two years of ethnographic work in six dif-
ferent mosques that offer women training
in religious virtues and virtuous women the
opportunity to instruct others. While
teachers and participants reflect a diversity
of socio-economic locations, interpreta-
tions of virtuous living and pedagogical
practices, they share a common commit-
tment to the cultivation of Islamic virtue as
a vital counter to what they perceive as the
erosion of Islamic values in Egyptian socie-
ty.

This deliberate cultivation of tradi-
tional Islamic virtues and the kinds of
agency it fosters, Mahmood contends, is
not easily rendered within the analytic cat-
egories offered by feminist thought. Informed by a western, liberal notion of the
self, and caught in an intellectual bind by
the fusing of its analytic and prescriptive
projects, much of feminist thought has
been unable to take seriously the kinds of
agency that women who live their lives in
accordance with traditional prescription
exercise. Utilizing poststructuralist theory,
drawing heavily on Foucault and Asad, she
argues that tradition is best understood as a
discursive formation rooted in a sense of
time within which specific kinds of selves
are generated. In approaching the practices
of these traditional women, she dem-

particular religious movement which, as
she ably demonstrates, is deeply informed
by the understanding that religious prac-
tices generate desired religious capacities
and sees the cultivation of those capacities
as its task. In developing ways to approach
this material she returns to the Aristotelian
roots of the notion of habitus, its emphasis
on training in virtue, and its understanding
that practices are critical in the formation
of moral actors.

In focusing on the move from exterior
to interior, she looks in some detail at bod-
ily techniques of dress and prayer as impor-
tant sites for the cultivation of religious
intention and emotion, engaging with and
critiquing arguments about the body and its
role in discursive formations. In line with
her developing critique of the liberal femi-
nist subject, she emphasizes that bodily
practices done in adherence to traditional
norms do not necessarily represent
thoughtless submission to oppressive
norms. But neither do they necessarily
indicate a kind of latent feminist agency.
Rather, she uses this case to argue that the
conflation of agency with resistance is a
fundamental mistake that feminism makes,
rendering it unable to see other forms of
agency and how they might meaningfully
shape women’s lives.

Politics of Piety is an important book
for many reasons. It is a significant contri-
bution to knowledge about women’s
involvement in Islamic revival movements
and how movements that ostensibly limit
their engagement to the cultivation of reli-
gious practice come to have political signif-
ificance. It is also an important attempt to
forward a critique of political liberalism,
western notions of the self, and of the fem-
inist project so deeply indebted to both.
Her argument in favor of separating femi-
nism’s analytic and prescriptive projects
should generate important conversation
about the development of feminist theory
and methodology. Finally, Mahmood’s
approach to the question of the body and
the significance of bodily practices raises
some interesting questions about the rela-
tionship between ethics and the body, offering some useful direction to a sociology of ethics.

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God, Sex and Politics: Homosexuality and Everyday Theologies, by DAWNE MOON. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, 281 pp.; $64.00 USD (cloth), $25.00 USD (paper).

From high up in the Ivory Tower, it is often easy for us to forget that the debate over the morality of homosexuality is still being waged. In fact, few issues are as divisive within contemporary American culture. In God, Sex, and Politics, Dawne Moon investigates one place where the debate could not seem more explosive: the United Methodist Church (UMC). Between 1996 and 1998, Moon spent fourteen months at City Church—a large, metropolitan, diverse, ritualistically-oriented, and theologically liberal congregation—and another seven months at Missionary Church—a small, rural, less-diverse, pietistically-oriented, and theologically conservative congregation. City Church unofficially associated itself with the pro-gay Reconciling Congregations Program. Conversely, Missionary Church unofficially associated itself with the anti/ex-gay Transforming Congregation and Confessing movements. Moon argues that the avoidance of politics by people within these churches ironically helps to reproduce power and privilege.

For those in these churches (and often in the broader society), “politics” includes anything that involves conflict, polarization, self-interest, current events, baseness, isolation, combativeness, artificiality, ill-will, the profane, physicality, animalism, the body and, by extension, sex and homosexuality. Moon argues that the members in these churches instead pursue what they see as “truth,” a notion which includes spirituality, humanity, selflessness, timelessness, loftiness, togetherness, caring, the natural, transcendence, the sacred, love, health and, by extension, the spirit and heterosexuality.

The strongest theoretical influence on the book seems to be Foucault whose theories of discipline are uniquely illuminated by Moon’s insightful analysis. When members engage in what others see as politics, members of both churches attempt to delegitimate their statements and actions. The de-legitimating or “denaturalization” strategy most often employed by those in Missionary Church involved dismissing dissent as either ignorant or deceitful. Moon associates this with what Foucault termed exclusion. The denaturalization strategy more often employed by those in City Church, on the other hand, involved labeling dissenters as having an immature faith or as being unloving. Moon associates this with what Foucault termed discipline. Thus, she finds that the more consensus-based organization of City Church required discussions that ended up being highly disciplining regardless of the egalitarian intentions. What this means for the UMC is that social activism and any involvement in controversy is compartmentalized and pushed out of the church.

Moon finds that congregants were able to defuse or “naturalize” beliefs that might otherwise seem combative by couching them in the language of feelings, emotions and, most effectively, pain. She argues that this strategy proves effective because emotions are so often taken to be unchallengeable. In effect, deployments of emotion introduce stalemates which are insurmountable and, according to Moon, this is why they are so often invoked instead of more contestable references to science, Scripture, and the like. Importantly, we see that, contrary to popular belief, debates about homosexuality rarely employ biblical exegesis or formal theology. Congregants are much more likely to use their own per-