

SMITH, Christian; ADAMCZYK, Amy. **Handing down the faith:** how parents pass their religion on to the next generation. New York (NY): Oxford University Press, 2021. 258 p.

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Religious socialisation has been extensively studied over the last decades, with the USA being the reference for the western world for the quantity and quality of its analyses. Although there are several studies, the underlying culture of religious socialisation has been understudied. This is the motif of this present book. The authors, both Americans, Christian Smith, professor at the University of Notre Dame, a distinguished specialist in youth religiosity, socialisation, and culture, and Amy Adamczyk, professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a younger but a solid specialist in religion and culture, joined their sociological expertise in this book. They explain in the introduction that “social scientists have conducted surprisingly little reliable empirical research on the culture of parenting in the intergenerational transmission of religious faith and practice” (p. 3), meaning that “few have studied the perspectives and approaches of parents themselves when it comes to the religious socialization of their children” (p. 4).

This issue requires a qualitative approach since the comprehension of cultural traits obliges to deeper analyses not provided by quantitative studies. That is why they applied an array of interviews (215 to religious parents; 20 to non-religious parents) during 2014 and 2015. These interviews represent part of America in terms of religious groups (white conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, black Protestant, white Catholic, Latino Catholic, conservative Jew, Mormon, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist) and states (11 states and DC). Yet, a stratified sampling process was applied to produce a sample as representative as

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possible of the socio-demographic diversity of the selected religious groups and of the reality under study (cultural models that influence religious socialisation). To complement these interviews, to support and to contextualise them, authors used four nationally representative surveys/datasets of American parents and congregations. This triangulation is undoubtedly a strength of this work but, as the authors mention, the heart of this book's argument is in the interviews.

Chapter 1 describes the cultural models that underlie intergenerational religious transmission of most of American religious parents. After describing its simplest and most compressed version, the authors unpack it in a few models: life's purpose, experience in the world, religion's value and truth, nature of children, tasks of parenting, family solidarity, and role of religious congregations. These models serve as a framework for the following chapters to help interpret them. Chapter 2, based on one national survey and on the interviews, analyses the influence of parent religiousness, styles, and conversations on religious matters on their offspring's religiousness, plus the influence of religion on the quality of marital relationships and the corporal punishment. Its main conclusion is that religiousness, styles, and conversations are important to successfully transmit religion, confirming previous findings. Chapter 3 is a theoretical chapter analysing the reasons why parents are the crucial agents of socialisation. The authors develop their arguments around two key ideas: parents are the ones that spend the most time with their children, talking with them and inculcating the importance of religion in their lives; contemporary culture shifted from a model of community solidarity project to a model of personal identity accessory, based on privatisation and the imperative of self-reflexivity, reinforcing the importance of parents. Chapter 4, based on two national surveys, analyses parent religiousness and religious activities, religious priorities and expectations for their children, their relationship with their children, their socialising practices and influence on children's choices. Contrarily to the other chapters that focuses on more religious parents, this chapter gives a big picture of American parents, comprising all degrees of religiousness.

Chapter 5 has a qualitative perspective, based on dozens of interviews with the four major immigrant religious groups of the sample: Muslims, Buddhists,

Hindus, and Latino Catholics. Each group is analysed in terms of religious practice in America today, its interaction with American culture, and finally the challenges and the difficulties in religious transmission, which are associated with the idiosyncrasies of each religious culture, their socio-economic status, and the attitudes of the surrounding communities. Despite great differences between them, parents of these four immigrant groups want to build strong moral foundations in their children so they can succeed in an increasingly difficult culture. Chapter 6, based on one national survey and on the interviews, discusses a few aspects: first, the influential aspects of parents' socialisation by their parents in their children's socialisation, including the dichotomy dialogue/strictness and the practices in the childhood; second, the socialisation of their children, including strategies (moderating religion, dichotomies osmosis/intentional influences and demands/freedom) and actors (grandparents and the interaction with partners and ex-partners). Chapter 7, based on two national surveys and on the interviews, explores the relationship between parents and congregations, including the factors that explain it (satisfaction with congregations, contextual changes, comfort on representing religion, geographical proximity) and the assets that they value (formal religious education, moral instruction, enjoyable religious activities, friends, and community). The main conclusion is, although parents consider congregations as important for their children in many respects, they are the main agents of religious socialisation.

There are only two less positive aspects of this book. The first aspect is formal. Perhaps chapter 3 could be chapter 2 as it is more theoretical. Even though chapters 2 and 6 use data from different national surveys, and chapter 4 uses data for all American parents, unlike the other chapters, perhaps they could be organised differently, namely be presented sequentially. Also, chapter 5 doesn't seem to make sense in the middle of them, since it could be before chapter 7. As it stands, it seems disjointed and/or repetitive in some parts. The second aspect, methodological, concerns the sample. Although the authors defend their sampling decision well, as the appendix shows, in a large country like the US, with so much ethnic-religious diversity and which is one of the best examples of a religious market, the number of respondents could be larger. Of course, resources

are always scarce, and even in a rich country like the US, these projects cost money and time. Probably a larger number could improve the reliability of conclusions, reinforcing the strength of this book.

One of the most interesting contributions of this book is the array of new and confirming results. While this book validates the crucial role of parents in passing on religion to their offspring, this has been done by previous studies. Congregations, youth groups, religious schools, or others are not the main formative agents, but the parents. It also confirms previous research on the importance of parenting style. Here it becomes clear that the authoritative style, a mix of authority, tenderness, and communication is the best to effectively transmit faith to children. Associated with this parenting style, the importance of parent conversations on religious matters, also previously analysed, is plainly confirmed. Besides these confirmations, which are always important, its main and novel contribution is the comprehension of the process of transmitting faith from parents to children. As the authors point out, one practical take-away of this book would be: “parents need not only to “walk the walk” but also regularly to talk with their children about their walk, what it means, why it matters, why they care” (p. 225). This main conclusion links with the previous, that the socialisation process must be based on communication and reflexivity, in a context of authority, to be effective. This is a strong idea of this book, the notions of constant questioning and dialogue, inserted in the reflexive modernity and democratic maturity of the congregations, where individuals, increasingly, think about their actions and options and discuss them with their communities, including families and congregations. In fact, as authors affirm in conclusion (p. 226): “Human beings, especially in the twenty-first century, are environment-monitoring and self-reflexive creatures. We want to know what is happening around us and how it influences what is happening to and within us, so that we can better understand ourselves in relation to the social and natural worlds in which we live.”

In short, this a very interesting book on religious socialisation, based on qualitative information and quantitative data from the US, and across a few religious groups that represent the religious landscape well in this country. Not only this triangulation made up of interviews and four national surveys, but also

the qualitative sample made up of different types of American parents enable to identify major themes and differences among them. The main remark would be the issue of sampling, but, as in all studies, resources are scarce, so researchers use what is possible.