Review of Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives, by V. Turner and E. Turner

Joseph F. Kelly, John Carroll University

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After spending over twenty years uncomfortably close to shirl Doomsday predictions of an unmanageable (by the West) population "explosion" (in developing countries) and their hectic, often arrogant translation into erratic programs of salvation via this or that contraceptive technology, this sober, well-written, appreciate review of 96 "experiments" in 30 developing countries concerning the actual delivery of family planning services by various means is a very welcome contribution. The analytic part (82 pages), following very sensible consideration of feasible experimental frameworks and methodologies, summarizes the experiments and the approaches and findings under six heads: personnel (16), mass media (19), the integrated health approach (16), intensive efforts and camps (10), incentive payments to acceptors (6), and "inundation" i.e., using many methods at the same time (14). It ends with a realistic agenda of priorities and methodologies for further experimentation. The second part of the book (169 paper) summarizes each of the experiments in turn country by country and includes 17 pages of exemplary appendices and bibliography.

What I am apprehensive about is that the very sobriety, good order and sense of completeness that the book conveys may tempt hard pressed policymakers and administrators to use the range and level of information in it for making or, more likely, defending program choices when these depend for efficacy on contextual dimensions and the sound management of them. The authors acknowledge that "the setting appears to be a key variable" (p. 11), "a determining factor in... success" (p. 63), but do not go on to map the dimensions of it or their probable interactions. The conceptualizations that are emerging in the literature on political dynamics, organizational environments and institutional building, especially linkage theory, could have been used for this and allowed at least some characterization, however crude, of each experiment in terms of key environmental variables. As it is, the summaries of experiments have not even a category for the so important setting. Program mix and sequencing are other important practical aspects to which more attention might have been useful, using the work of e.g., Everett Rogers and Richard Udry and their colleagues.

That this is a desk study, relying on published sources, is certainly another limitation but also shows how very useful work is possible on this basis even in an applied, current and barely emerging field.

University of South Carolina
Columbia, S.C., U.S.A.

Rolf P. Lyntia


This book is a fine combination of scholarship and readability. The Turners contend that pilgrimage is a major socio-religious phenomenon and thus worthy of anthropological study. The choice of Christian pilgrimage is especially important because it reveals a side of Christianity rarely seen among scholars who are likely to be familiar with that tradition's intellectual representatives, such as Bultman or Cobb. Indeed, many theologians who think they are speaking for and to "modern man" would do well to learn how irrelevant theological modernity is to many Christians.

The Turners define pilgrimage as a "liminoid phenomenon," that is, a "voluntary, not an obligatory social mechanism to mark the transition from one state or status
to another within the mundane sphere, pilgrimage is limnoid rather than liminal” (p. 254). The bulk of the book is an attempt to prove this thesis, mostly by the collection of data.

Pilgrimage centers abound literally throughout the Christian world. Although the best-known ones are in Latinized areas such as Mexico (Guadalupe), significant sites are even found in northern Europe such as Walsingham in Great Britain and Knock in Ireland. Although the Turners had no necessity to choose only a few sites, they made good choices both geographically and historically. They briefly discuss medieval pilgrimages, including a few sites no longer frequented, and their discussions of still-flourishing sites pay careful attention to the historical background, for example, the origins of Guadalupe and Lough Derg. Their tentative identification of Etheria with Sylvia of Aquitaine (p. 164), while not original to them, shows how judiciously they researched the historical material. The modern material is much more accessible and often previously studied, especially the Marian shrine at Lourdes, but the Turners pursue the material as rigorously as the historical data. In sum, they prove their thesis.

But that statement, however accurate, does no justice to this book. Let me make just three points to show how much more it is.

First, the Turners have a fine job of making a technical study readable and convincing. The narrative sections on Lough Derg and La Salette are superb, and this reader was almost sorry to see them end. The authors have worked in their evidence effectively and unobtrusively. The evidence seems to fit naturally into their theory, one rarely has the feeling it is being forced.

Second, the authors are remarkably sensitive to the pilgrims. These pilgrims are, of course, objects of study, but the reader senses that the Turners always empathized with them, took them seriously and even enjoyed their company. This makes many of their observations, such as the pilgrimage as a modern via crux (p. 6), more pertinent and convincing.

Third, the authors do not hesitate to draw relevant (in the best sense of that overused word) conclusions. For example, Marian pilgrimages are rarely taken seriously by liberal Western intellectuals, but the Turners point out that these pilgrimages have always strengthened the female principle in a patriarchal society. “May we not trace, in the history of Marian pilgrimage, woman's progress from almost anonymous and faceless nurturer vehiclehood to an individualized, liberated femaleness, seen through the 'masculine' eyes of Western culture as both nemesis and the coming of a new age?” (p. 286). The reader comes away wondering how much sophisticated disdain is veiled sexism.

This fine book deserves a wide readership.

John Carroll University
University Heights, Ohio, U.S.A.

Joseph F. Kelly


The Status of Women in Pre-Industrial Societies tackles a deceptively simple question: do men always dominate women? In the process of finding whether women universally have low status, the author poses a rigorous and provocative set of considerations for social scientists, development planners and feminists alike. His central conclusion is