



Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life

Meredith B McGuire

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How can we grasp the complex religious lives of individuals such as Peter, an ordained Protestant minister who has little attachment to any church but centers his highly committed religious practice on peace-and-justice activism? Or Hannah, a devout Jew whose rich spiritual life revolves around her women's spirituality group and the daily practice of meditative dance? Or Laura, who identifies as Catholic but rarely attends Mass, and engages daily in Buddhist-style meditation at her home altar arranged with symbols of Mexican American popular religion? Diverse religious practices such as these have long baffled scholars, whose research often starts with the assumption that individuals commit, or refuse to commit, to an entire institutionally framed package of beliefs and practices.

Meredith McGuire points the way forward toward a new way of understanding religion. She argues that scholars must study religion not as it is defined by religious organizations, but as it is actually lived in people's everyday lives. Drawing on her own extensive fieldwork, as well as recent work by others, McGuire explores the many, seemingly mundane, ways that individuals practice their religions and develop their spiritual lives. By examining the many eclectic and creative practices -- of body, mind, emotion, and spirit -- that have been invisible to researchers, she offers a fuller and more nuanced understanding of contemporary religion.

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