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For information:  
Journal of Religions and Cultures,  
The Department of Religions and Cultures (FA-101)  
Concordia University  
1455 de Maisonneuve O.,  
Montreal, Quebec  
H3G 1M8

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***Does God Make the Man? Media, Religion, and the Crisis of Masculinity.*** Stewart M. Hoover and Curtis D. Coats. New York and London: New York University Press, 2015. x + 223 pages. \$27.00 USD (Paperback).

*Does God Make the Man? Media, Religion and the Crisis of Masculinity* is part of an ongoing series of scholarly work referred to by the authors as inquiring “into meaning making among audience members” (vii) within the contemporary United States. Where prior studies have examined specific demographics (women, the elderly, etc.) or units (families, individuals, etc.), our authors are seeking to address a number of perceived gaps. The first, is the examination of men as men and how a man’s gender affects their experiences of meaning-making in the media; and second, that the academy (which in this case, one would suspect is specifically media studies) has traditionally had a “blind spot” for religion and undervalued its potential worth as an area of inquiry (viii). Therefore, this study seeks to answer how man’s religion affects not only his self-understanding as a male, but also to what extent it affects his engagement with the media in his society as a whole.

Relying on a large pool of interviews conducted in the years prior to this publication, Hoover and Coats ground their observations in first hand data. Importantly, they are clear to state that this study focuses on a particular demographic of religious men (white, Christian but mostly Protestant, nominally heterosexual). The study is therefore not intended to speak for all religious men in the United States.

The book is divided into three main chapters, along with introductory and concluding sections. In the first chapter, “The New Christian Patriarchs”, we witness two predominant viewpoints extricated from the interviews. The first is the perceived loss of male authority in both the public or domestic sphere. Growing gender equality and changing societal norms have given the appearance that men are no longer in authority (though appearances are often just that – appearances). The second is the apparent lack of a “masculine” character in contemporary religious institutions.

The question is then raised, that if the sources of their faith are not also the sources for their masculine identity, then from where do they derive it? The prevailing attitude appears to be that masculinity is somehow inherent in a man’s body; that there is something essentialist about manhood—although it is in danger of being overpowered. We of course know that masculinity “does not operate in a vacuum” (40), but through the negotiation of culture,

society, other genders, and so forth. However, to the media-consuming men in this study, they see their manhood as made up of basic elements such as provision, protection and purpose. While some of these elements would seem to come from their faith and scriptures, we soon discover that there is a stronger tendency to identify with them through other media.

The second chapter, “The Media that Matter”, places more stress on the ambiguity of male identities and the complex, and often contradictory, ways gender is negotiated through society—particularly in the sources where these men find their role models. Interestingly, rather than dive into Biblical literature for model masculine behaviour, these men prominently find imitation worthy behaviour in secular media. Though the media is stereotypically perceived to be anti-Christian, or to solely posit values at odds with Christian society, the Christian men interviewed consume secular media as much as their secular male counterparts. In these media, these men find and create role models from which to emulate their behaviour very much the same as the rest of society—but not wholesale. Therefore, rather than create their identities in opposition to secular media, we can see traces of a careful selection process.

In the third chapter, “Elemental Masculinity, the Domestic Ideal, and Everyday Life” we see how these elemental qualities are understood and acted out—with a notable emphasis on the domestic sphere. This chapter also follows up on some intriguing questions about the relationship of these elements to secular media. For instance, what is it about largely fictional characters, such as William Wallace—or even Mel Gibson, the actor who plays him—that captivate Christian men so much? It would appear that through these avowedly secular figures, Christian men identify with the traits they feel they share with these characters: married, heterosexual, a sense of justice, strength of character, and so forth.

Ultimately, it seems that Christian men view the same programs that secular men view, but engage with them in different ways. Thus, through the media, religious men participate in the broader culture, engaging with its values and negotiating their own identities in the process. While these men’s Christian background and faith do contribute to their alleged self-understanding as men with regards to values, one cannot help but notice the similarities between their perceived ideals of Christian masculinity and the characters from secular media who embody them. The answer to the question phrased in the title of this monograph “Does God make the man” is “not quite.”



Overall, though this work does succeed in the continued problematization of the apparently “traditionalist” notion that religious identities can provide an element of stability to masculine identities, it does fall short in a few select areas. Firstly, one has to wonder whether there is much left to question about the so-called “crisis of masculinity”. Over the past fifteen years, numerous scholarly studies have already problematized the notion that masculinity undergoes select periods of crisis. Second, one cannot help but notice many parallels here with the observations found in James Gilbert’s 2005 monograph *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (which happens to be absent from this monograph’s bibliography). Though Gilbert’s monograph focuses on a different period in American history and with a broader area of study (and not just television media), Hoover and Coats’s remark that “there was a ‘crisis’ of the domestic sphere” (186) and the perceived loss of power in different domains of society ring equally similar to themes pulled from Gilbert’s study.

This criticism, however, is not meant to detract the reader from the overall worth of this monograph. Hoover and Coats succeeded in delivering a meticulous and thoughtful study with careful attention to detail, even if this monograph is not necessarily ground-breaking. Perhaps a wider chronological reach of study or a broader comparative approach among different masculine identities would be well-suited as a future undertaking in men, media and the construction of their masculinities.

Alexander Nachaj  
Concordia University

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***Canadian Women Shaping Diasporic Religious Identities.***

Edited by Becky R. Lee and Terry Tak-ling Woo. Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016. v+pages.371. \$36.00CDN (Paperback).

This interdisciplinary collection of essays examines the intersectionality of religion, gender and transnationalism by focusing on the ways in which women of diasporic communities in Canada shape, formulate and (re) claim distinct cultural and religious identities. The significance of this study becomes apparent if we take into consideration the socio-cultural context of multiculturalism in Canada, where, with the passing of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in July 1988, “government officials expected religious groups to define their own identities, especially when it came to