

convinced that religion is as central as Weisenfeld claims it is when we reach the end of her analysis of films in the 1940s.

A particularly important aspect of Weisenfeld's book will be its usefulness to film critics, scholars of religion, and historians. The research is based on wide reading in mainstream and black newspapers, memoirs and autobiographies, and archival collections of writers, directors, producers, performers, and censors. The work is keenly attuned to contested meanings of films both between blacks and whites and within black communities. No simplistic analysis is offered. As Weisenfeld notes, on the one hand, through its representation, "black religion becomes a sign and symptom of the perpetual backwardness and outsider status of African Americans" (236). On the other hand, a very complex and nuanced process was involved in the production and reception of these films, and differences over time in response to changes and events in the broader culture are charted with careful attention. By taking seriously these various visual arts and moving beyond well-used textual and musical sources, Weisenfeld has deepened and expanded our understanding of the stuff of African American religious life and blacks' place in the American cultural imagination.

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*Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change.* By  
**Melissa J. Wilde.** Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007.  
xvi + 196 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

*Vatican II* is an excellent analysis of the internal workings of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962–1965)—from the key transforming events of the first session that redefined its purpose from a mere rubber-stamping of the previously written curial agenda to the nuts and bolts of the competing and collaborating interest groups that passed, or failed to pass, subsequent decisions on religious freedom, the role of Mary, and the permissibility of birth control. Dr. Wilde's research was based on archived transcripts of interviews with eighty of the most important bishops and theologians at the Council, plus photocopies of the original vote tallies on the above issues.

The book's main argument is a sociological one: that the Roman Catholic Church is an organization and, as in all organizations, its leaders' primary interest was in preserving the Church's *legitimacy* within its organizational

field (30). She thus postulates the existence of four blocs of delegates, according to the particular circumstances of the Church in various parts of the globe (6). Bishops from countries where the Church enjoyed a stable monopoly, such as Italy, Spain, and Ireland, saw no need for change or “marketing” of the Church to adherents, and they strongly opposed any ecumenical overtures. The remaining three blocs, on the other hand, were pro-change. Bishops from countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States—where Catholicism shared a more or less stable organizational field with several Protestant denominations—desired increased ecumenical contacts but were not overly interested in proselytizing. Bishops from Latin America, who were threatened by burgeoning evangelical sects, were interested in marketing Catholicism but resisted ecumenical overtures. Finally, bishops from emerging countries in Africa and Asia prioritized both ecumenism and marketing the faith (48). The book is a study of how these latter three pro-change blocs, aided by their mutual belief in the collegiality of all bishops, were able to compromise their differences through an extremely efficient network of communication and coordination. The anti-change bishops, hampered by their belief in the superiority of hierarchy over collegial consultation, were not able to mount an effective counterattack, even when a majority of the 3,000 delegates actually favored their position.

In addition to the historical value of shedding light on a key period of recent religious history, the book also makes an important sociological contribution. For the past fifteen years, the ascendant theoretical paradigm in the sociology of religion has been the so-called “supply-side” theory, which postulates that more persons in a given society will be religious if there are several religious denominations competing for their allegiance. The theory assumes that the clergy of each denomination will be more likely to exert themselves in such a competitive environment in order to prevent “leakage” of congregants to other faiths.

Wilde adds an important qualification to this prediction. She cites the Neo-Institutional Theory of the sociology of organizations to argue that, for organizational elites in stable environments, the salient referents are not their clients or customers, *but rather their peers in other, similar organizations*, with whom they have reached a tacit market-sharing agreement. It is only in unstable, truly competitive environments that organizational leaders must take the changing tastes of their clientele into account. Thus, bishops from religiously diverse but stable countries were more interested in Council decisions, such as the Declaration on Religious Liberty, that affected their ecumenical relationships with Protestants, while bishops from countries where Catholicism was threatened or in an extreme minority had to pay more attention to the concerns of their clientele. If their flocks revered Mary or were oppressed by the ravages of poverty, the bishops needed to address these issues.

Another of Wilde's key insights is the role of networks in controlling the agenda of a large group. This observation has been made in other religious contexts (for example, Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles* [New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990]), but Wilde is the first to apply it to the 3,000 Bishop-Delegates to the Vatican Council. As a result of their extensive networking, the so-called "Domus Mariae" bishops were able to communicate with almost 75 percent of the delegates quite quickly. In contrast, the conservative bishops were limited to contacting like-minded delegates one at a time. As Ammerman has previously pointed out in her study of liberals and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention, each side's ideology was a key resource, either legitimating or preventing such networking.

I can find very little to criticize about this book. My sole quibble is a minor one—the footnote numbering appears to be "one off" in several places—most notably between footnotes 25–70 in chapter 2, which do not match the numbers in the text. Otherwise, speaking as a sociologist, I find *Vatican II* to be a path-breaking work, one that will influence the field of the sociology of religion for many years to come. Historians, too, will appreciate the chance to get inside the workings of a usually opaque process, whose controversies reverberate to the present day. I urge scholars from both disciplines—and interested Church officials and laity as well—to avail themselves of the opportunity.

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***When I Was a Child: Children's Interpretations of First Communion.***

By **Susan Ridgely Bales**. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. xiii + 257 pp. \$55.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

In *When I Was a Child*, Susan Ridgely Bales challenges scholars of religion to add age to the standard analytical categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality when interpreting religious experience. As her main work, Bales presents a careful ethnographic analysis of the attitudes and beliefs of children throughout the process of preparation for and reception of the Catholic sacrament of First Communion. Bales pauses midway through her presentation of her ethnographic project to describe a new methodology for studying children as subjects and informants.

Bales's study follows two classes of first communicants in different parishes through the yearlong process of preparing for and receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time. She is attentive to regional, ethnic, and