

basically Christian from totalitarianism. It is sufficient to show that Church leaders misread the nature of the crisis and overlooked one of its greatest horrors. The inadequacy of the Church of England's leaders was not conscious disregard, but adherence to an outlook that allowed them to misconstrue social realities. This may not have been the moral failure that Lawson suggests, but it was a failure.

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doi: 10.1017/S0009640708000413

Awesome Families: The Promise of Healing Relationships in the International Church of Christ. By **Kathleen E. Jenkins**. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005. xii + 284 pp. \$22.95 paper.

At the center of Kathleen E. Jenkins's sociological study of the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) is the sticky problem of why members believe that the church creates "awesome" families yet outsiders contend that the group destroys families. This question began as a personal one for the author, who discloses in the introduction that a family member had joined the church. "As a family member, I wanted to find a way for my brother and my parents to come to understand each other" (4). Through seven well-researched chapters, Jenkins tells the story of members' attraction to ICOC's therapeutic promise to heal, fortify, and construct families. Her keen eye for the contradictions of individualism versus collectivity, submission versus authority, and ideology versus practice make this an engaging read that is relevant beyond the scope of this now defunct small group or even the study of new religious movements. *Awesome Families* provides an in-depth look into the lives and experiences of members and demonstrates the power of communal accountability in forging religious identity.

Jenkins argues throughout the book that, like many other new religious movements, the ICOC did not represent so much a break with culture as the use of strategies of culture such as prevalent therapeutic models to shape religious goals and identity. She employs an ethnographic approach, conducting interviews with members and ex-members for five years, engaging in participant observation at meetings, meals, and other events, and monitoring websites. She found a racially diverse group of people who sought to enhance their family lives through the traditional evangelical formula of strict gender roles that carry over from the family to church and

to society. The people who joined this group submitted to an extensive therapeutic program called “discipling” that covered all aspects of a believer’s life from marital problems to weight loss. New members were matched with those mature in the faith, couples were counseled on sexuality, and parents were guided in child rearing. The therapeutic model of intimate encounters, accountability, and counseling mined all relational problems with solutions that solidified the bonds of the religious “family,” often at the expense of the birth families who remained non-members.

Although the “discipling” seems excessive and intrusive—to say the least—many of the discussions and literature that animated these discipling groups and encounters are current in mainstream evangelical culture. In chapter 2, “An Unsinkable Raft in a Foreboding Divorce Culture,” the conservative religious and political concerns expressed about the family, marital sexuality and divorce, and the fears of the threat to these values by a monolithic liberal culture seem ordinary, not extraordinary. As Jenkins points out, the extraordinary lies in the degree of effort extended to preserve these values. For example, divorce was not an option in the ICOC (unless a spouse was abusive, adulterous, or spoke out against the church), and marriage discipling was mandatory. This process included pre-marital counseling; guidance on gender roles and ideals; constant submission to disciplers’ intervention; disclosure of all aspects of marriage, no matter how private; and close matching of couples with similar relationship challenges. No area of marriage is left for the marital couple to ponder alone. Public testimony of the power of discipling to save troubled marriages reinforced the practice as healthy and as promoting sanctified unions. While they use the same dieting manuals and sex manuals as mainstream evangelicals to have godly bodies and sacred sex, the round-the-clock intervention of discipling moves this group beyond the women’s prayer group or the pastor-and-wife team marital workshops so familiar in mainstream evangelicalism.

Jenkins’s chapter “Awesome Kids” demonstrates the pressures and potential payoffs of child rearing in this tightly knit religious group. ICOC parents were repeatedly reminded of the troubled culture that surrounded their children in ICOC printed texts, workshops, sermons, and discipling sessions. In interviews with Jenkins they voiced their convictions that the church community provided a unique nurturing environment where all the adults were responsible for educating and ministering to the children. “Kingdom Kids” for small children and various teen ministries for young adults began the discipling process in childhood by focusing on conversion, evangelization, and peer accountability. In principle, much of what Jenkins describes is consistent with evangelical child-rearing manuals such as James Dobson’s *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1970) and evangelical youth culture. The difference is in degree. Families were watched very closely.

Parents were sanctioned if their children did not participate fully in these discipling relationships, and they were urged to allow other adults (“brothers” and “sisters”) to disciple their children. Jenkins notes that parents reported that they were grateful for other adult help in their children’s spiritual development, but she suspects that this also created enormous pressure on parents and children. For example, as often as parents heard about the dangers of children living outside of the kingdom, they listened to testimony of the success of “awesome kids” raised within the community. Parents boasted of their children’s perfect grades, striking beauty, athletic and musical talents, and commitment to Christ. Reading through this section, I wondered, where are the kids with the learning disabilities, the physical and emotional delays, the less-than-stellar looks? Surely they are part of this community, but where do they fit in with the promise of perfect children who are the products of a spiritually elevated group of parents? Who takes responsibility for potential disjunctures between the ideal and the real in a system that is so neatly organized? The parents? The children? The movement that in Jenkins’s words “promised too much”?

By the time Jenkins finished her research in 2004, the ICOC had disbanded. She concludes that tensions between the ideals sought and the realities of everyday practices, such as in child rearing, led to the decline of the community. The enormous demands on the members’ time for discipling as well as contradictions between submission to church authority and the individual free will of the therapeutic model led to internal conflict and dissension. *Awesome Families* is an engaging book. At points the narrative is repetitive, but overall it is an accessible and interesting view into the dynamics of a short-lived authoritarian religious group. The book will be a welcome addition for religious studies scholars with particular interests in new religious movements, families, and gender.

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doi: 10.1017/S0009640708000425

Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement. By **Tanya Erzen**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. x + 285 pp. \$50.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

Abstinence-only education, purity pledge cards, virginity renewal ceremonies, tirades against same-sex marriage: U.S. culture is saturated with Christian sex talk, though we know surprisingly little about the everyday impact of such