

**“One nation under God”:
Identity and Resistance in a Rural Atheist Organization**

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Abstract

This work explores identity development among members of the Atheist Station, a meeting place for agnostics, secular humanists and atheists in rural, southwest-central Pennsylvania. Utilizing the research and conceptual framework provided by “communities of practice” social learning theory¹ this work attempts to better understand member participation, meaning-making and the subsequent development of an atheist identity taking place within this highly marginalized group.

“No, I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God.”

Then-U.S. Vice President George H.W. Bush during his Presidential campaign,
August 27, 1987.

Introduction

[1] At the crest of the Allegheny Mountains in southwest-central Pennsylvania, lies the village of Gallitzin. Incorporated in 1872 and once at the epicenter of bustling lumber, mining and railroad industries, the community has more recently sustained a prolonged period of post-industrial hard times. With a current population of some 1,700 residents—overwhelmingly White, Catholic and working class—Gallitzin maintains its historic, working-class feel with tightly-built company houses. Many of these are perpetually covered in the soot that emanates from the coal trucks still rumbling through town.

[2] The railroad's presence is even more intensely felt as the community is home to the famous Gallitzin Tunnels. Completed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these railroad tunnels allowed for the free flow of goods west from northeast seaports. Engineering marvels in their day, they were so important as to be guarded during World War II. Rail aficionados from throughout the world still make the trek to Gallitzin, waiting in anticipation for massive locomotives to come thundering through the cavernous structures.

[3] In 2002, a small group of local residents began to restore a dilapidated barber shop resting directly beside the tunnel's main observation point. Once a common brown, the

group repainted the structure a “flamboyant red”² and embellished it with three-foot-high, white letters spelling out “Atheist Station” across the structure’s façade. Led by Jan, the building’s owner and a local atheist activist, and fueled by then-breaking sex scandals in the Catholic Church and the highly Christian rhetoric of newly-elected U.S. President George W. Bush, this small group of non-believers banded together to create a visible challenge to what they saw as the “loutish behaviour”³ of many religious folks and the weakening separation between church and state.

[4] Jan and others from the Atheist Station publicized a litany of this loutishness through the local media—confrontations surrounding the display of religious symbols in public buildings in nearby Clearfield and Altoona, Pennsylvania (at one session, Station members had to be escorted from the building by local police); the increasingly visible link between patriotism and belief in God (particularly evident after the September 11th terrorist attack), and attacks from local Catholic officials on then PA Governor Tom Ridge’s pro-choice political stance, to name just a few examples.

[5] Such were the beginnings of the Atheist Station, a gathering place in the mountains of west-central Pennsylvania for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other free-thinkers. The creation of the Station was a “coming out” of sorts for this group—a means of both resisting and encouraging others to take a stand on what they perceived as the unchecked intrusiveness of religious organizations into public life. What follows is an exploration of learning and identity development in this highly marginalized group, using communities of practice social learning theory⁴ as a frame for highlighting both the dynamics of Station members’ identity development as well as the larger socio-historical issues shaping their decisions and activities.

Communities of Practice

[6] Social learning theory provides a helpful lens through which we might better understand the “socially embedded nature of learning—insights that, in turn, can be systematically utilized to enhance adult learning in various social contexts.”⁵ Such socially imbedded learning serves as the basis of identity construction. This is very much the case for examinations of religious practice that are profoundly embedded within specific contextual and historical settings.

[7] The notion of “communities of practice,” was first presented by Lave and Wenger⁶ and popularized in the areas of business and industry: “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”⁷ In such groupings, learning is often not the intent, but results as an incidental part of the groups’ interactions. According to Wenger, communities of practice share:

A Domain—Communities of practice are not simply clubs or networks of friends but have a shared domain of interest to which members specifically identify. As a result, this interest “implies a commitment to

the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.”⁸

A Community—As members pursue competence within their domain, they engage one another, sharing information, collaborating and discussing their mutual pursuit. These relationships enable and encourage learning.

A Practice—Communities of practice are not simply communities of interest. Members are practitioners who develop “a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice.”⁹

[8] One might logically ask, “what is atheist practice?” At one level, such a question implies that atheism is simply a negation of religious faith and holds no active social obligations or identifiable beliefs or behaviours—i.e., nothing comparable to “religious practice.” Baggini¹⁰ has argued convincingly for a rethinking of such a position, noting that to see all things as being grounded in the natural world is, indeed, a legitimate and defensible worldview that is experienced and lived out in practical ways. Wenger makes clear that practice involves “doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do.”¹¹ As such, it is emergent, involving the whole person and not limited to “traditional dichotomies that divide acting from knowing, manual from mental, concrete from abstract.”¹² The idea of “religious practice” is well established; non-religious practice seems a logical if unexplored alternative.

Ideology and Communities of Practice

[9] It is important to specifically address how ideological development and communities of practice social learning theory are related. As importantly, such an overview will provide valuable vocabulary for the broader findings that follow. To expedite such an exploration, we can focus on three aspects of communities of practice theory—participation, meaning making and reification.

[10] Wenger notes that learning “takes place through our engagement in culture and history. Through these local actions and interactions, learning reproduces and transforms the social structure in which it takes place.”¹³ Wenger primarily focuses on learning as social participation—a process that includes engagement in the practices of communities and “constructing identities in relation to these communities.”¹⁴ Participation in communities requires the possibility of mutual recognition among members—the ability “to recognize something of themselves in each other”¹⁵—and mutual meaning-making—the social negotiation of meaning that “is at once both historical and dynamic, contextual and unique”¹⁶ and that makes our individual and collective lives meaningful. It is in this mutuality that participation becomes a wellspring for identity development.

[11] Reification is “the process of giving form to our experiences,”¹⁷ congealing these experiences into “tools, symbols, stories, terms and concepts.”¹⁸ Like participation, reification is both product and process—a thing that shapes and is shaped by the social interactions inherent in communities.

Methods

[12] The Atheist Station has roughly 11 participants, five of whom could be considered “core” given their involvement in group events and activities that engage the Station in wider atheist communities (such as Pennsylvania Nonbelievers, a statewide group with whom I am currently engaged in additional research). Given the sample size, an effort was made to contact all participants. While I have spoken or corresponded with several members (including atheists affiliated with the Station through other organizations), three core Station members were willing to participate in more intense, semi-structured, open-ended interviews taking place over several months. These discussions focused on Wenger’s characteristics of communities of practice and probed what Lave and Wenger¹⁹ term “legitimate peripheral participation.” Legitimate peripheral participation is, simply, “the process by which newcomers become included in a community of practice,”²⁰ including changing patterns of participation and the transformation of identity.²¹ Identity formation thus plays a central role in this work, both as it relates to the “formation of the person”²² and as it relates to the “creation and use of markers of membership, rites of passage and social categories.”²³ Station members were encouraged to speak broadly about their lives leading up to their membership in the group, and to elaborate on current beliefs, activities and relationships both inside and outside the group.

[13] Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method.²⁴ In addition, Atheist Station has an active web page (www.atheiststation.org) and members regularly express their views in writing to various newspapers and politicians. In short, there was a rich store of published and unpublished material available that shed light on the group’s activities, organization and subsequent learning.

[14] Lastly, there is the Atheist Station itself—a small, red structure in the midst of a rural, mountain, railroad community. The Station’s location, near a parking lot frequented by rail enthusiasts, provided an ideal spot for unobtrusively observing the context and informally engaging local residents and visitors in conversations regarding the Station and its activities. Thus, interviews, document/artifact analysis and participant-observation allowed for the development of valid and defensible findings.

Atheism in the U.S.

[15] While estimates vary, the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey indicates that “the non-believer population has grown to 29.4 million [from 14.3 million in 1990], roughly 14.1% of the American community.”²⁵

[16] At the outset, however, it is important to understand just how marginalized this growing segment of the population is in the U.S. Recent research has identified atheists as “America’s most distrusted minority.”²⁶ National data indicate that “atheists are less likely to be accepted publicly and privately than any others from a long list of ethnic, religious or other minority groups.”²⁷

[17] Edgell, Gerteis and Hartmann also point out two very important aspects of this isolation. The first is that such marginalization comes at a time when the nation as a whole is growing more accepting of non-Protestant religious belief.²⁸

[18] Second is a strong connection in the U.S. between nationalism and religion—particularly Christian religious belief. Christian nationalism is largely grounded in what Goldberg calls “dominionism,”²⁹ a movement “built on a theology that asserts the Christian right to rule. That doesn’t mean that non-believers will be forced to convert. They’ll just have to learn their place.”³⁰ In the national political arena, these themes are linked closely to powerful evangelical figures like Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council and Pat Robinson of the Christian Broadcasting Network, and their far-reaching political and social impacts have been documented by various authors.³¹ Specifically, Goldberg notes that “The iconography of Christian nationalism conflates the cross and the flag.”³² “It claims supernatural sanction for its campaign of national renewal and speaks rapturously about vanquishing the millions of ‘Americans who would stand in the way’.”³³ As noted by Gerteis and Goolsby, “nationalism always rests on the creation of a collective ‘we’ in opposition to a specified or unspecified ‘they’.”³⁴ To a large extent, “atheists represent a symbolic ‘other’ against which some Americans define themselves as good people and worthy citizens.”³⁵

Findings

The Domain—Finding and Participating in a Marginalized Community of Practice

[19] As noted earlier, Gallitzin, Pennsylvania is a small, rural community of some 1,700 residents—mostly white, working class and Roman Catholic. In years past, many would have worked in the coal mines that dot the region or on the railroad that remains intimately tied to the community’s identity.

[20] Today, however, consolidation and technological advances have decimated these historic industries and residents are more likely to find employment in the rural “new economy’s” bustling service sector, specifically eldercare and prisons. What has not changed, however, is the power of the Catholic Church. Cambria County (within which Gallitzin rests) ranks sixth in number of Catholic congregations in the Commonwealth³⁶ and is second in Catholic per capita “rates of adherence.”³⁷ Furthermore, the town is named for Father Demetrius Gallitzin (1770-1840), “Apostle of the Alleghenies” and currently a candidate for canonization as a saint. Within such a local social climate, to identify publicly with atheism or atheist organizations remains a highly stigmatized act.

[21] As noted earlier, when experiences congeal into “thingness,” Wenger refers to it as a process of reification.³⁸ Also noted earlier, nationalism and religion are strongly linked in the U.S., and on the local level in Gallitzin, the resulting “thingness” of this link is powerfully present.

[22] Such beliefs are congealed in bumper stickers proclaiming “United We Stand, In God We Trust” or in the transit bus signs flashing “God Bless America” (a practice that was challenged and stopped by the Station). As such, Station member practice and subsequent learning both shapes and is shaped by this ever-present religious nationalism. As Ben, one of the founders of the Station recently told me, “Our organization’s endorsement is typically a death sentence for a local politician. If we dislike someone, all we need do is publicly support them in the next election and they’re sure to lose.”

[23] Wenger notes that practice is largely about “meaning making”³⁹ or talking about and understanding our changing actions and beliefs in a social or historical space. Such meaning making is always negotiated in relation to a given context as we continually “negotiate anew”⁴⁰ our world. This process ultimately results in the creation of identity.

[24] The religious nationalism that pervades Gallitzin has impacted Station member’s practice, clearly curtailing their ability and willingness to engage the local community in meaningful dialogue. The organization has had a difficult time finding open- or like-minded others and garners little understanding for their views. Locals have referred to Station members as “lost” and “brazen” while members routinely speak of locals as “religious idiots.”

[25] Like other marginalized groups, the Station has utilized the Internet to stimulate dialogue and challenge dominant structures beyond their small group. The move to the web is interesting in that originally, the Station had planned to use their building in Gallitzin as a catalyst for discussion. Jan, the building’s owner (and one of the founding members), planned to use a large window in the front of the facility to display materials challenging conservative Christian positions on such things as abortion rights, immigration law, homosexuality and the social roles of women. Shortly after the Station opened, vandals shattered the display case. It was repaired and the windows were shattered again. As a result, the windows are now boarded up. “The police have been no help” says Ted, a Station member whose imposing size and powerful voice belie a thoughtful assessment of the dilemma. “We figure it’s just kids, but the message they’re getting is that it’s OK to destroy our property because we’re atheists. They don’t want to read anything that might make them think. But the Internet’s a portal they can’t shut down ... a place where they can’t shut us up. And that scares the hell out of ’em.”

[26] Locally, the Station has drawn its membership through more pedestrian media, namely local newspapers and, oddly, through a small, conservative radio station that has generally been open to broadcasting their comments during listener call-in shows (members are quick to point out, however, that access through local media outlets is constantly in flux as editors and hosts include or reject their input with little to no

rationale). While Merriam, Courtenay and Baumgartner note that, “it is not at all clear how someone joins, learns or practices in a marginalized community,”⁴¹ in the case of Atheist Station, this community of practice formed and continues to draw membership from participation in the local media—calling radio shows and aggressively writing letters to local newspaper editors, usually in response to a religious leader’s or organization’s comments.

[27] “What initially galvanized our group,” says Ben, “was a letter written by Bishop Adamec taking then Governor Ridge to task for his stance on abortion. Bob, a member from a neighboring community, wrote a powerful letter to the editor of the Post really tearing Adamec a new you-know-what and I thought, ‘I’ve gotta meet this guy.’ Then things really started to come together.”

[28] The domain or unifying interest of Station members is their belief in the power of reason and rational thought. For these men and women, the supernatural is a delusion and conversations regarding it meaningless. Competence as a member is displayed by both rhetorical skill and a broad knowledge of history, philosophy and religion’s role in public affairs—all of which are gained through participation in the group where discussions and debates flow freely any time they gather together. It should be noted that gatherings are typically organized to either address a specific local issue of importance (perhaps a controversial statement from a local religious official or some perceived violation of the separation of church and state) or simply to socialize with an outing to a baseball game or a barbeque.

[29] These conversations, however, typically revolve around the U.S. American experience. All the members with whom I spoke were raised by practicing Christian parents and all described to me an early understanding of just how powerful the Church’s role was in their community and beyond. “My parents were religious—not crazy religious but we went to church,” says Ben, “It was a Mennonite church and I guess if I’d have found something there I enjoyed ... something that drew me back...I might be a Christian today. But I just didn’t get it. So I read the Bible and the more I read the more I thought, this just doesn’t make sense.” Ted interrupts with, “I’ve felt this way since I was thirteen. I just knew it was all make believe. All these religious nit-wits. ...”

Community—Resistance and Moving to the Centre

[30] As in earlier works on marginalized communities of practice,⁴² group members in the Atheist Station evidence a progression from the periphery to the centre in regards to practice. Such a move is closely linked to both participation and competence. Wenger describes competence as knowing how to engage with others in a particular community. Competence is fostered by (and displayed in) activities that provide “occasions for applying skills ... occasions for exercising judgment and mutual evaluation,”⁴³ and on the exchange of artifacts that support tasks the community sees as meaningful.

[31] Atheist competence for Station members is displayed by engaging in public debate, generally through local media—radio call-in shows, letters to the editors of local newspapers or direct action such as protests and speaking out at public meetings—and engaging in Station activities such as planning sessions or their recent trip to York, Pennsylvania for the Pennsylvania Nonbeliever’s Winter Solstice gathering.

[32] “In our small group at Atheist Station, we’re pretty similar in many ways,” says Ben. “But when we head to larger meetings there are some differences that crop up. A short time ago we had a split between Republican or conservative atheists and Democratic or liberal atheists in regards to politics—things like abortion rights, immigration, that kind of stuff. We certainly don’t agree on many of those issues—just like religious people. But we make those decisions for ourselves, not because some power in the heavens told us what to do or think.”

[33] The Station is a politically liberal group that stands in stark contrast to the staunchly conservative Republican residents of rural Pennsylvania. And while their atheistic views may have been sufficient to isolate them, their political leanings only further marginalize them. “We have had little contact with other groups ... no one wants to affiliate or partner with us regardless of how much we agree on an issue,” says Jan, a long-time atheist activist who has recently taken a break from her work at the Station due to fatigue. “The only place we’ve seen some common ground recently has been through the anti-war movement. We’ve shown up at some rallies and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with religious groups. But it’s an uncomfortable alliance that disappears as soon as the rally’s over. We come on our own ...”

[34] All of this points to members’ further marginalization from the larger culture as they move to the centre of their group. As a result, moments like the anti-war protests described above happen only because Station members insert themselves into broader public debates—they are never invited. Indeed, I discovered this group after viewing a local public broadcasting documentary in which the Atheist Station was featured. These shows highlight specific local communities by providing cameras to select residents and allowing them to videotape the things in their community that they feel are most significant. The Atheist Station was allowed to participate in this show only after Jan, then the group’s chief organizer, showed up at a production meeting and insisted on being given a camera. To avoid what likely would have been a very public and protracted battle, the producers agreed, and Atheist Station was included in the film.

[35] Member competence is thus generally displayed in very public and contentious moments of resistance to dominant forms of religious faith and political ideology. In such a setting, members identify strongly with other members and share in their collective resistance. “I have never been happier in my life,” says Ben. “I don’t have to hide what makes me tick ... how I see the world and what’s important. I don’t have to be silent anymore or afraid that someone will find out. So what if they do. These people have helped me to realize this.”

Practice: Knowing and Doing in Rural Pennsylvania

[36] As noted above, Station member practice is largely played out and their competence displayed in public acts of resistance. These acts are supported through informal learning activities such as email discussions, blogging, and personal reading from the growing number of popular texts concerning atheism, including Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*,⁴⁴ Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers*,⁴⁵ and Francis Collins' *The Language of God*.⁴⁶

[37] Group members' commitment to reason and rational thought aligns easily with these identifiable learning activities and some members comfortably associate themselves with what has become known as the "Brights Movement," an international organization whose members profess a naturalistic worldview free of supernatural and mystical elements.⁴⁷

[38] Station member efforts are evidenced by an intense appreciation for the power of discussion and a willingness to resist the dominant culture in sometimes interesting ways. Ben, for example, recently shared with me his attempts to tie up the telephone lines of a television evangelist's fund-raising campaign.

TV—How can we help you?

Ben—Oh ... I want to help you ... I want to give everything I have to your ministry and follow the Lord ... How about \$100,000, will that be okay?

TV—PRAISE THE LORD! What is your name?

Ben—Ben

TV—Ben, how do you spell your last name?

Ben—Jesus knows my name.

TV— [after a long pause] You don't understand—To fill out this form, I need the spelling of your full name and address.

[39] As noted earlier, the act of "coming out" is perceived by many atheists in the U.S. as frightening and even dangerous. Since all of the members with whom I spoke own and operate their own businesses, they see encouraging other freethinkers as a primary part of their educative roles. Jan drives a red van emblazoned with a license plate reading "ATHEIST." "I've lost business because of it," she says. "But I've also had people follow me to say they never knew there were other people who felt this way in the area. People come up to me sometimes and say, 'I've never met a real atheist before.' And I reply, 'Oh, I bet you have.'"

Closing

[40] The religious nationalism that continues to pervade U.S. life is well-documented; indeed, the interplay between religion, politics and the media remains a powerful force throughout the world.⁴⁸ But within the larger culture exist a growing group of women and men who are challenging the commonly-held belief that citizenship and religious faith need be intimately linked.

[41] The Atheist Station in Gallitzin, Pennsylvania is part of this larger effort—their practice helping to understand and resist their own exclusion from public life. Such work contributes to an emergent atheist identity in the U.S. and to the dissection of reified conceptions of democracy, patriotism, and citizenship that have been closely tied to religious faith.

[42] Rural places and rural religion remain marginalized areas of study in a rapidly urbanizing and globalizing landscape.⁴⁹ As such, it is difficult to generalize about what is “typical” in rural religious practice and the development of religious (or non-religious) identity in rural communities. Continued research is critical to better understanding rural faith development and how rural residents are negotiating their increasing intersections with divergent and diverse worldviews.

[43] Wenger's work points out that such interactions are part of a larger social learning process, ultimately resulting in the development of identity. In short, social learning and identity development are intimately bound. For members of the Atheist Station, this emergent process plays out in moments of private struggle as well as moments of public resistance. The learning that takes place as these men and women interact enables them to negotiate and reconceptualize their own roles as citizens.

Notes

¹Jean Lave and Etienne Lave, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²Tom Gibbs, “Gallitzin Graced by Atheist Station,” *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, 14 July 2002, par. 15. <http://www.post-gazette.com/localnews/20020714atheist0714p4.asp> (accessed October 26, 2006).

³Ibid.

⁴Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵Sharon B. Merriam, Bradley Courtenay and Lisa Baumgartner, “On Becoming a Witch: Learning in a Marginalized Community of Practice,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 53 (May 2003): 171.

⁶Lave and Lave, *Situated Learning*..

⁷Etienne Wenger, "Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction," par. 4.
http://www.ewenger.com/theory/communities_of_practice_intro.htm (accessed January 3, 2007).

⁸ Wenger, "Communities of Practice," par. 7.

⁹Wenger, "Communities of Practice," par. 8.

¹⁰Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press USA), 7-10.

¹¹Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 47.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.,13.

¹⁴Ibid.,151.

¹⁵Ibid., 56.

¹⁶Ibid., 54.

¹⁷Ibid., 58.

¹⁸Ibid., 59.

¹⁹ Lave and Lave, *Situated Learning*.

²⁰Ibid., 100.

²¹Ibid., 11.

²² Ibid., 13.

²³Ibid.

²⁴ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (2nd edn.; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

²⁵American Atheists, Inc., “Survey Indicates More Americans Without Faith,” 22 November 2001, par. 1. <http://www.atheists.org/flash.line/atheist4.htm> (accessed January 15, 2007).

²⁶Penny Edgell Joseph Gerteis and Douglas Hartmann, “Atheists as ‘Other’: Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society,” *American Sociological Review* 71 (2006): 211.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*, 213.

²⁹Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), 7.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995); William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005); Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Clyde Wilcox and Carin Larson, *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006); Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*; Chris Hedges. *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

³²Michelle Goldberg, “What is Christian Nationalism?” The Huffington Post, 8 September 2006, par. 6. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-goldberg/what-is-christian-nationa_b_20989.html (accessed September 8, 2008).

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Joseph Gerteis and Alyssa Goolsby, “Nationalism in America: The Case of the Populist Movement,” *Theory and Society* 34 (2005): 199.

³⁵Penny Edgell, Joseph Gerteis and Douglas Hartmann, “Atheists as ‘Other’: Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society,” *American Sociological Review* 71 (2006): 214.

³⁶Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA). “Catholic Church—Number of Congregations (2000),” <http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/maps/map.asp?state=38&variable=10> (accessed January 11, 2007).

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 58.

³⁹Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 51.

⁴⁰Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 52.

⁴¹Sharon B. Merriam, Bradley Courtenay and Lisa Baumgartner, "On Becoming a Witch: Learning in a Marginalized Community of Practice," *Adult Education Quarterly* 53 (May 2003): 171.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 238.

⁴⁴Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

⁴⁵Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004).

⁴⁶Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

⁴⁷The Brights Network, "What is a Bright?" <http://www.the-brights.net/> (accessed January 29, 2007).

⁴⁸Hedges, *American Fascists*; Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming*; Philips, *American Theocracy*.

⁴⁹Jeffrey A. Ritchey, *The Role of Religion in Shaping the Rural Context: A Study of a Small, Rural Community in Pennsylvania* (Lewiston, NY:Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); Ritchey, "Negotiating Change: Adult Education and Rural Life in Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education Journal of Lifelong Learning* 15 (2006): 1; Ritchey, ed., "Adult Education in the Rural Context: People, Place and Change," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 117 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).