

Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital edited by Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman. Brill, 2010. 273pp., \$146.00/€113.00. ISBN-13: 9789004184510.

Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban edited by Arie L. Molendijk, Justin Beaumont and Christoph Jedan. Brill, 2010. 406pp., Hb., \$177.00/€137,00. ISBN-13: 9789004185449.

William J. F. Keenan, *Liverpool Hope University*, keenanw@hope.ac.uk

Keywords

Implicit Religion, Late Modernity, Postsecular, transcendence

As volumes 12 and 13, of the International Studies in Religion and Society series (edited by Lori G. Beaman and Peter Beyer), both these wide-ranging collections have their origins in international conferences addressing the role of religion in contemporary late modernity. *Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital* presents twelve essays by established scholars and junior researchers collectively challenging the established social scientific orthodoxy: that modernity, in the shape of individualism, science and technology, irresistibly tolls the death knell of the sacred. *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* extends this general critique of the dominant secularization paradigm through twenty articles on zones of public religion, governance and civil society, engaging with the deprivatization of religion thesis, postsecular urbanism, and the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in city life. The series and volume editors have done a splendid job bringing theoretical, methodological and disciplinary diversities into concerted, comprehensive and critical engagement with major “hot” topics in the academic study of contemporary religion.

Impossible as it is to do justice to a total of thirty-two refined discussions of component parts of what might be called the emergent postsecular paradigm, the focus of this review will be on the *implicit religion* dimensions of the contributions overall. It has to be said that the IR aspect is decidedly more implicit than explicit in both volumes, although Karen Pärna’s contribution in *Religions of Modernity* on “Digital Apocalypse” —remember the “millennium bug scare”?—is (explicitly) bang on the IR button. “Y2K survivalism,” she writes (245), “grants us access to key features of the millennium bug scare in a concentrated form and it provides us with a mag-

nified image of the implicitly religious facts of the more mainstream millennium bug scare.” She points here to a characteristic capacity of the IR orientation, namely, its power to unearth and “suss out” “religious undertones” (247), within ostensibly “non-religious” predicaments.

There is a recurring interest in “new age” matters throughout this particular volume, a tendency to see ubiquitous openings to the transcendent at every turn, from “life spirituality” (Siobahn Chandler), work (Kirsten Marie Bovbjerg), New Age spirituality itself (Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman), science fiction, of course (Carly Machado; Adam Possamai and Murray Lee), to digital and computer technologies (Dorian Zandbergen; Stef Aupers). The hovering implicit religiosity of so much that is at the cutting-edge of the late modern era, where technologies of human selfhood fade into transhuman engineering, where questions of vertical and horizontal transcendence assume vital species-wide import, suggests interesting potential for closing the gap between *social* science and science fiction. Will our knowledge modes not also change radically with our genomic reconstruction? There is sound advice in Linda Woodhead’s chapter on “real religion” and “fuzzy spirituality,” that with so much attention to what is “emerging,” “possible,” round-the-corner and up-ahead in the foggy fields of free-range spiritualities, students of religion—real and imagined (students and religion both!)—would be well-advised to keep both a sense of history and their feet “on the ground” (31).

Religions of Modernity: Relocating the Sacred to the Self and the Digital has a sustained “Bergerian” preoccupation with the persistence of “enchantment.” Editors Houtman and Aupers are attentive to the mileage still remaining in the old sociological dogs, Weber and Durkheim, each of them providing “a promising point of departure for shrugging off the Christian bias in the sociology of religion and its narrow emphasis on secularization and religious decline” (25). The “bias” they refer to here is not self-evident, at least in the U.K. *Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious, the Political and the Urban* strikes a decidedly “no-nonsense” *realworldist* attitude, hunting-dog style, as it were: out there among the cracks, crackpots and crackheads of the urban jungle, sniffing out the uses and abuses of “faiths,” where angels (and social scientists with a lofty “transcendentalist” take on religiosity) fear to tread. The intent is “critical,” the buzzword that pervades the volume from beginning to end. “Religion is back on the academic and political agenda in a major way,” opens the Preface, as if announcing a new age, a sigh of the post-millennium bug survivors. Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor are the presiding prophets of this postsecular turn to the

old Gods, their flocks dressed up in late modern, urban multicultural garb. One sides with one or t'other, it seems...at least till the next "turn."

Beaumont (3) sets the agenda: "Everywhere we look questions of secularism and alleged postmodernism feature within academic, policy and media circles." Knott (34) proclaims: "The fact that religion is on the rise, represented by faith, and that it has breached the boundary of what was commonly deemed to be a secular public domain has raised the stakes for everyone, irrespective of their ideological orientation." Describing himself (60) as a "reflective non-secularist, like Gellner," Gregor McLennan smells something of a pre-Enlightenment rat in all this reinvigorated God-talk by any other name: "a dramatic narrowing of human vision, sustained by a series of intellectual misperceptions." The Marxist terrier, a Habermas-McClennan breed, is nothing if not terrier-like in defence of secularist grounds of faith.

A less dogged position, based on sustained nuanced research on Western counter-cultural and Latin American Pentecostalism, is adopted by Bernice Martin in her pro-Taylorist stance on "contrasting modernities" (81): "We can abandon many unproductive disagreements about whether something is 'really' religious or not, by placing it on the map Taylor has provided." Regrettably, space does not permit discussion here of the very many fine contributions on the postsecular paradigm that together make this exciting body of work, in both these excellent volumes, clear testimony that the study of religion, in the many contrasting, overlapping, explicit and implicit forms to be found in this late modern era, is alive and well and prospering, not only in the cracks between disciplines but at the forefront of the intellectual agenda. While a note of surprise, that this is so, is apparent among many of the contributors to these volumes, it is evidence that the field of IR is "on to something," that few (if any) of the growing numbers of implicit religion scholars are wont to say, coolly and without rancour, "We told you so."