

Book Review

Robert K. Johnston, Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor (eds.), *Don't Stop Believin': Pop Culture and Religion from Ben-Hur to Zombies*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2012, pp. xxii + 217, ISBN 978-0-664-23505-5 (Pbk).

This small, idiosyncratic dictionary of (Western) pop culture and (predominantly Christian) religion from the 1950s–2000s sits comfortably between such volumes as *From Abba to Zoom: A Pop Culture Encyclopedia of the Late 20th Century* (David Mansour, 2005) and *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* (David Morgan, 2008). Its subject matter is culturally akin to such interdisciplinary offerings as *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture* (Roland Boer, 1999), *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Bruce D. Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, 2000), *Religion and Popular Culture: Rescripting the Sacred* (Richard W. Santana and Gregory Erickson, 2008), *The God Tube: Uncovering the Hidden Spiritual Message in Pop Culture* (James Lawler, 2010), *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture* (Terry R. Clark and Dan W. Clanton Jr., 2012), and *Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes Our Souls* (Clive Marsh and Vaughan S. Roberts, 2012). But why the editors eschewed 'Dictionary' from their title is puzzling, although Steve Perry's plea-cum-popular song title from his American rock band days with *Journey* is thematically apt.

The bulk of contributors are expert American religion scholars whose passions include 'major[ing] on the majors' (p. xiii), '101 theologically significant figures and trends' (p. xiii), and '101 pop culture icons that stir up something in our spirit' (p. xii). Furthermore, the editors 'hope the core theological truths shine through' (p. xii) and 'might sharpen our understanding and appreciation of Scripture' (p. xiv) as 'We explore books, movies, music, shows, plays, people, products, and games as an entry into ultimate questions—and answers' (p. xii).

Structure-wise, the book consists of the Title(s) and Production Details, Contents, Introduction, Contributors, six decades ('The Fifties' to 'The Oughties', with pictures), 101 Entries (*Ben-Hur* to *Zombies*) arranged alphabetically per decade, plus a Conclusion with Notes written by Robert K. Johnston. However, the Conclusion is actually an addendum essay that explores three important approaches to the pop culture–religion interface, namely: 'boycott', 'plunder', and 'conversion', but why it was tacked on and not an integral part of the Introduction is perplexing.

Construction-wise, the book's dictionary entries mimic commentaries, it contains an unnecessarily repeated football vs. soccer explanation in 'Pelé' (pp. 87 & 88), and it suffers such curious omissions as Reverend Lovejoy from the entry on 'The Simpsons', two of the titles in the epic trilogy from the entry for 'The Lord of the Rings and J.R.R. Tolkien', and the biopic *Walk the Line* (2005) from the entry on 'Johnny Cash'. Regrettably, the book is not scholar friendly. There are no indexes, no bibliography per entry or for the Introduction (containing many book, film, and TV titles), no author attribution per decade, no Further Reading list, plus the frequent pedagogic mistake of assuming readers *already* know about the topic *before* informing them (notably within the Introduction), thus confirming the editors' confession of 'a dashed-off quality' (p. xiii) to their book.

Although all 101 entries are noteworthy pop culture exemplars, their links to religion, theology, spirituality, and scripture (hereafter 'religion') are often obscure, bland, or platitudinous; thus potentially leaving one confused or irritated. For example, 'Bruce Lee', 'Calvin Kline Ads', 'David Beckham', 'Facebook', 'Mary Tyler Moore', and 'Nelson Mandela' ignored any substantive religious references, while 'Charles and Ray Eames', 'Clint Eastwood', 'Dr. Phil', 'Got Milk? Ads', 'iPod', 'Macintosh', 'Michael Jordan', 'Miles Davis', 'Nike Ads', 'Quentin Tarantino', and 'Volkswagen Ads' only tenuously mention religion (perhaps to justify their inclusion?). Such deficiencies were dramatically contrasted with those entries that did justice to both pop culture *and* religion, such as 'Lost', 'Malcolm X', 'Mitford Series and Jan Karon', 'The Matrix', 'The Simpsons', and 'U2', which begs the question why similar relevancy requirements were not rigidly enforced throughout. Ironically, the book's not-quite-there nature was graphically symbolized by the missing Vulcan alien, Spock (Leonard Nimoy), from the crew picture of the SF TV series *Star Trek* that adorned the centre of the cover page collage.

Overall, *Don't Stop Believin'* is a quick, one-stop shopping way to get students, congregations, and pop culture syllabi up to speed; whether professionally or personally, for faith or field-focused. One will always quibble about entry assessments and potential inclusions or exclusions; nevertheless, readers will find many pleasures buried within that could fuel their own scholarly explorations, which alone is worth the price of purchase. One looks forward to the editors expanding the number, breadth, depth, pictures, referencing, and the religious relevancy of their entries in future editions.

Anton Karl Kozlovic
Flinders University