

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman**, eds., *Religion, Globalization and Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 608 pp. \$US 99.00 paper (978-90-04-15407-0)

**W**hile the literature on globalization is now quite vast, relatively little has been written — at least directly — on religion and globalization, with the noteworthy exception of Peter Beyer's own earlier work. As the editors correctly note in their introduction to this significant collection of essays, analyses of religion rarely factor into discussions of globalization. When they do, the discussion is limited largely to a consideration of fundamentalism (Christian, Islamic, or otherwise) as a reaction to the forces of globalization. This volume is predicated on the alternative notion that “[l]ike capitalism and the nation-state, religion and religiousness are an integral aspect of whatever we mean by globalization . . . and have been since its inception, wherever and whenever this is located” (p. 5). Consequently the focus of attention is on the mainstream traditions across the world, as well as other forms of religious innovation and adaptation, and religious developments are treated as the creative sources, carriers, and consequences of the cross-cultural processes of social change that are identified with globalization.

This is a substantial volume, both in size, range, and depth of coverage. The twenty-seven chapters are likely to be used selectively by most readers, but it provides a good balance of theoretical and empirical materials dealing with everything from the instrumental role of religion in new cultural configurations (e.g., alternative and immigrant religious groups in Europe) and forms of social action (e.g., religious NGOs) to the specific manifestations and implications of attendant religious changes in different regions and cultures (e.g., Japan and Korea, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America). The chapters are divided into four parts: Theoretical and Global Perspectives; Religious Institutions and Globalization; Key Issues in the Relation of Religion, Globalization and Culture; and Regional Particularizations. Only a selection of themes and specific arguments will be treated here, in part because of the sheer volume and diversity of material covered, but also because the book lacks a sufficiently delineated and overarching conception of “globalization.” The authors' sense and application of this concept are too variant, a problem most readers would anticipate. But the editors could have mitigated the

effects by providing a more systematic overview of the conceptual options at the beginning of the book and perhaps a critical review of the key issues raised at the end. The counterbalance is necessary if globalization studies are to acquire the kind of shared analytical discourse required to make meaningful comparative studies possible.

In the initial and rather eclectic theoretical essay of the volume, Roland Robertson raises the provocative idea that we have entered a "phase" of globalization marked by "millennialist" themes. He adroitly traces the apocalyptic character of global concerns in the spheres of national affairs, international relations, individual selves, and humanity, and links the developments to an argument for the conjoined ethnocentrism and inadequacy of secularization theory and rational choice theory in the sociology of religion. Perhaps even more provocatively, George Thomas argues that globalization must be understood in terms of an emerging world culture based on a narrative of global rationalism that is moralistic in character and functionally the equivalent of an immanent salvation religion. As Robertson and others argued long ago, in both scenarios the movements of resistance to globalization (fundamentalist or otherwise) are themselves implicitly drawn into the larger dialectic with the unintended effect of fostering the very global consciousness and culture they wish to deny. A revived appreciation of the brilliance of Durkheim looms large in both essays, as it does in José Casanova's pivotal essay "Rethinking secularization: A global comparative perspective." This reprinted work lays the theoretical foundations for a true comparative sociology of globalization and religion, making a strong logical and empirical case for breaking free of the existing debate over American versus European exceptionalism in analyses of secularization, and religious developments generally, in favour of a more refined paradigm of multiple modernities, multiple social differentiations, and multiple secularizations.

In harmony with these theoretical perspectives, in Part Two Beyer extends his earlier work arguing that the contemporary study of religion must be placed in a global frame based on the imperialist triumph of a distinctly European, early modern, conception of the "form" of religion as "a distinct social sphere concerned with a postulated transcendent domain or reality" (p. 170). This reconstruction of the religious ("invention" of "religion") entailed a pluralistic conception of self-identified religions operating in synergy with other "secular" social spheres. As various non-Western elites collaborated in the re-imagining of their religious traditions as "world religions" they played an instrumental, though unintended, role in institutionalizing a Westernized social order in their societies. In this way, religious developments were instrumental

to the onset of globalization and it can be argued that the processes of globalization are not “inherently secular or secularizing” (p. 171). Beyer illustrates his argument by considering the Western imposition and non-Western appropriation of this model in the cases of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. These grand and intensive analyses are framed later by George Van Pelt Campbell’s summary assessment of “Religion and the Phases of Globalization.”

In other very informative chapters, John Boli and David Brewington trace the history and character of international or internationally oriented NGOs, marking their unique contribution to processes of globalization. Elisabeth Arweck undertakes a similar task with regard to new religious movements, concentrating on the transformative role of new global forms of communication. Laurel Kearns discusses the impact of globalization on the emergence and activist expression of religious environmentalism. William Stahl examines the forms of religious opposition to globalization, and in separated but related chapters Lori Beaman and James Richardson examine the influence of processes of globalization on the relations of religions and states, the history of human rights, and the treatment of religious minorities. These essays provide effective surveys of the relevant issues, organizations, and historical developments that could more readily be used in a variety of educational contexts.

The eight chapters in the last part of the volume tend to be even more descriptive or historical in nature, calling attention to both the ways in which religious traditions and activities in different parts of the world have been changed by new global institutions, technologies, and ways of thinking, and to the processes of glocalization — the specific and innovative adaptations of local religious life to global forces. Shandip Saha, for example, calls our attention to the special role of the concept of gurus and the guru-disciple relationship in shaping the global spread and impact of Hinduism, while Paul Freston makes an effective argument for the indigenous character of Latin American Pentecostalism and its importance (along with other traditions) in the development of a new non-Eurocentric Christendom.

As indicated, the riches of this large and variegated volume are not readily captured in a short review. Many interesting chapters have not been mentioned. The quality of the contributions vary, as is inevitable, but I can say that all are well written and helpful, and some will now become mandatory reading for my graduate students. Two irritating omissions deserve note: there is no list of contributors (which would provide some biographical information), and the bibliography for Casanova’s essay is missing. Otherwise I certainly recommend this book to students of globalization and religion, but also as a more general reference work

for all university libraries. As these essays demonstrate, yet again, there is no inherent antithesis between modernity (in almost all its manifestations) and the religious aspirations and imagination of humanity.

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

LORNE L. DAWSON

Lorne Dawson is a theorist in the Departments of Sociology and Religious Studies with expertise in the sociology of religion, particularly the study of new religious movements. Recent publications have dealt with the conceptualization of charismatic authority and the response to failed prophecy in millennialist movements (e.g., "The Scandal of the Lubavitch Rebbe: Messianism as a Response to Failed Prophecy," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 23 (2008):163–180), and innovations in the construction of typologies (e.g., "Church-Sect-Cult: Constructing Typologies of Religious Groups," in Peter Clarke, ed., *Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2008). [ldawson@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ldawson@uwaterloo.ca)