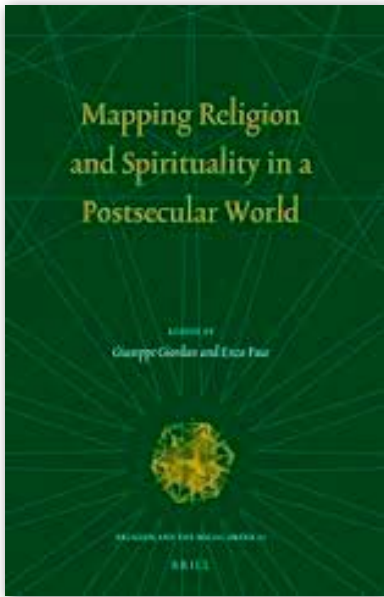


Reviews

The postsecular world

Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World, ed. Giuseppe Giordan and Enzo Pace Religion and the Social Order. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012.



The book *Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World* is volume number 22 in the series *Religion and the Social Order*, published by the Association for the Sociology of Religion and Brill Academic Publishers. The title points up clearly the aim of this collection: to map current religious and spiritual emergences. To this end

the editors have brought together a selection of articles from Europe, Asia and North America concerning issues of religion and spirituality and consequently they present a broad approach to the subject. The convergence of studies from Italy – five out of eleven – is probably due to the origins of the two editors: Giuseppe Giordan is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Padua, Enzo Pace is Professor of Sociology and the Sociology of Religion, also at the University of Padua (Italy).

In the introduction the editors identify the end of validation of secularization theory: since the 1960s more and more events have occurred which have shown a ‘new and unexpected relationship between the social actors ... on one side, and the sacred on the other side’ (1). This sentence should also make it clear that the role of religion has been in a state of continual change since the so-called pre-modern period. Giordan and Pace suggest that the persistence of religion today is much more complex and a part of a new cultural framework. To determine the new religious setting they propose three elements: firstly the individualization process; secondly the emergence of pluralism and thirdly a de-territorialization of the sense of belonging.

The editors are aware of the problems in implementing new theories and terms to describe the contemporary situation of religion. They explain the use of the disputed term ‘post-secular’ with its effect of highlighting the ambivalent consequences of secularization in the religious field: ‘Ultimately secularization has also had properly “religious” effects, and these occur with characteristics quite different from the typical religion of the traditional age’ (5). It is questionable that the term post-secular can be said to describe the contemporary religious trajectory very well, or if it is rather simply a term for some religious phenomena, or merely a new expression which hasn’t yet been clearly defined. It is a pity that this discussion was entered into only in the article entitled ‘Incarnating encounters’ by Ruth Illman. But even without discussing it nearly all the contributions’ discussions comprise the three post-secular elements. A more general article is ‘The beginning of life: a social constructionist approach’ by Anthony J. Blasi. His fascinating sociological study analyses ‘the processes involved in the emergence and persistence of the life-related ethical, hence also religious, issues’ (131). At this point the question arises as to whether the topic is already post-secular just because it is a contemporary

and religious topic. The merit of the article, the generalisation, assumes that the findings are also valid in pre-modern or secular times.

The other crucial term contained in its title and for the book as a whole is 'spirituality'. Giordan and Pace define it as follows: '... the "spirituality" model focuses the autonomous subject, who can construct paths of meaning that connect to the transcendent, even if on the edge of the traditional institutions or outside them' (4). They choose the term because it expresses mainly subjective issues such as emotions or individual experiences, which should be important in a post-secular world. Following Meredith McGuire (2003) the editors deploy it to question the very distinction, made by sociologists of religion, between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'.

Reference to spirituality pertains in most of the articles. Liselotte Frisk directly questions, in 'Religion, spirituality, and everyday life in Sweden', the concept, use and meaning of spirituality in different contexts in contemporary Sweden. She sees no sign of a spiritual revolution taking place, but rather indications that spirituality is related to higher education. In a (western) world with rising levels of education, the prevalence of spiritual attitudes may also increase. In the next chapter Ruth Illman discusses 'the relationship between spirituality, art and dialogue' (44) with the help of a presentation and analysis of the

musician Jordi Savall and the author Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. It is interesting that three of the articles address the relation between spirituality and prayer: Sophie-Hélène Trigaud in 'Christian prayer for human rights and peace', Monica Chilese and Emanuela Contiero in 'Young people's prayer: between religion and spirituality in the Veneto' and Isabella Jonveaux in 'Asceticism and the place of the body in modern monastic prayer'. In these articles a long-neglected topic in the sociology of religion is thus at the centre of interest. These contributions help especially to understand the individual's handling of religion in daily life. For example Isabella Jonveaux's article shows that the use of Eastern traditions in prayer is not mainly a sign of syncretism, but a response on the part of the monks she is studying to the modern world, which works without the body. In the Eastern traditions the body is more important for prayer. By adapting this model, monks can establish a harmony between body and spirit.

To sum up, all the articles provide an interesting insight into contemporary religious or spiritual phenomena. The problem of *Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World* is a problem most collections of this kind have. As Giordan and Pace write already in the introduction, they can only present a few fragments 'of the new religious landscape' (4). Of course a lot of questions remain to

be answered and of course not all questions can be answered in such a book. For example the reader doesn't learn about the religious and spiritual emergence in South America or Africa. He/she learns nothing about spirituality in Christian Orthodoxy and so on. In the end there is more research necessary to find the post-secular world everywhere. But the book is a mapping and shows a plurality of the contemporary religious landscape. It could be a good starting point and a great help for every researcher working on this topic.

MELANIE EULITZ



Melanie Eulitz, Diplom-sociologist, is a PhD student at the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Leipzig. In her thesis she analyses the changes in the

current Jewish community in Germany. Her main research interests include the sociology of religion, sociology of migration and biographical research. Email: meulitz(at)uni-leipzig.de

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