

## Book Reviews

**Fahmida Suleman (ed.):** *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 330 pp.

*Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'an and its Creative Expressions* is the outcome of an international symposium held at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, on 18–21 October 2003. The book reproduces sixteen selected papers from the symposium, including the introduction by the editor, the opening reflections by Oleg Grabar, and the final reflections by Sheila S. Blair. All the contributions focus on the material and visual expressions of the Qur'an. Local and regional differences from the Malay world, Iran, Mughal India, North Africa, West Africa and the Iberian Peninsula are discussed in great detail, and the examples dates from different epochs, ranging from the formative years of Islam to contemporary artists who have been influenced by the Qur'an in their work. Like so many other people of Muslim cultural background, the text of Islam holds a special and unique position for contemporary artists who in their art make use for example of calligraphy or words from the Qur'an.

Several chapters illustrate and emphasise that the Qur'an should not be understood merely as a text to be read. As the Arabic word 'Qur'an' indicates, it is above all an oral message, to be recited. But it is also a text to be reproduced in a beautiful way.

Consequently it is a pious act to copy and reproduce the text in beautiful handwriting or on a material object (ceramics, metal works, textiles, or as a wood carving). The importance of the visual aspect of the text may best be illustrated by the development of calligraphy. Because of the Islamic hesitation to reproduce images, calligraphy and the art of the luxurious copying of manuscripts (using expensive pigments, gold and the finest inks) became the most beloved art form in the Islamic world. In copying the Qur'an, however, it was also common to add non-figurative illustrations. By means of these signs it is even possible to identify specific copyists, as demonstrated in Ismaheel Akinade Jimoh's chapter on Qur'anic penmanship and illumination among Muslim scholars in southwestern Nigeria.

Several of the chapters in the volume focus on description rather than analysis, but there are important exceptions. For example, in Gülru Necipoglu's comparative chapter on Sinan's imperial mosque and its Safavid and Mughal counterparts, the inscriptions are analysed and discussed in relation to prevailing political and theological discourses and conflicts. The author argues convincingly that it is necessary to pay close attention to both the didactic function and the symbolic importance of the selected passages from the Qur'an that have been reproduced in the mosque if we want to be able to 'read' the calligraphy. In

other words, it is not enough to identify the specific verse or the artist behind the work: the text must also be analysed and situated in relation to the prevailing cultural, political and theological context. However, in order to 'read' the inscriptions, it is also necessary to differentiate between the intentions of the artist, the ruler and the audience. How a mosque visitor might understand an inscription does not automatically correspond to the original intentions of the artist or the ruler.

Objects with Qur'anic inscriptions are generally perceived as possessing a specific power. The connection between the word of God and artefacts is clearly represented on amulets, talismans, magic mirrors, banners and military standards. These examples illustrate that the Qur'an is not 'merely' a book that should be read or listened to; it is also a text that can be associated with performative actions and rituals. By inscribing the word of God on a material object, it was believed that a person or a whole army could be protected from misery and failure and become victorious and powerful. But to be able to afford to pay for expensive calligraphy or costly inscriptions was also an illustration of worldly power. The connection with symbolic power is clearly illustrated for example in Hülya Tezcan's chapter on Ka'ba covers from the Topkapı Palace collection in Istanbul. To pay for and be responsible for the cover of the Ka'ba is one of the most prestigious duties in the Muslim world.

With its numerous and beautiful colour images and the fine analyses of the visual and artistic expressions of the Qur'an that accompany them, *Word of God, Art of Man* has the potential to become a standard work in the fields of both Islamic arts and Qur'anic studies.

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**Paul-François Tremlett:** *Lévi-Strauss on Religion: The Structuring Mind*. London: Equinox, 2008, 121 pp.

**Ivan Strenski:** *Dumont on Religion: Difference, Comparison, Transgression*. London: Equinox, 2008, 150 pp.

'Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion', published by Equinox, is a welcome series, comprising a set of concise introductions to the life and work of various major figures in the social-scientific study of religion. These introductions are aimed first and foremost at undergraduates or others making their first acquaintance with the work and ideas of a particular scholar. It is probably a coincidence that the first books in the series – also including introductions to Bastide, Bourdieu and Derrida – are on French scholars. However, reviewing the accounts of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Dumont here together is a deliberate choice. Dumont was greatly influenced by Lévi-Strauss's ideas and his structuralist method. As the former admits in his *Homo Hierarchicus*, 'the introduction to the idea of structure is the major event of our times in social

anthropology and sociology' (Strenski, p. 15). The two anthropologists first met in 1936, and were reunited twelve years later when working at the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris. In the same year Dumont left for his first fieldwork in India, already equipped with the structural methods he had learned from Lévi-Strauss.

However, although Lévi-Strauss is widely credited with being the founder of the structuralist school in anthropology, the importance of his and Dumont's contributions to the structuralist analysis of religion is the reverse of what is generally believed. Strenski (p. 1) also recognises that – apart from the study of myth, ritual, totemism, and symbolism – little else that bears directly on the study of religion can be attributed to Lévi-Strauss. Dumont's ideas and work are in fact far more directly related to the study of religion, although, oddly, have received far less recognition.

Paul-François Tremlett's *Lévi-Strauss on Religion: The Structuring Mind* is a fairly standard overview of Lévi-Strauss's work. The book starts with what Tremlett calls the intellectual biography of Lévi-Strauss; it then continues with an introduction to the core ideas of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, and, not surprisingly, to Saussurean linguistics and the writings of Roman Jakobson. The second chapter discusses Lévi-Strauss's contributions to the study of kinship as a form of communication and exchange; the following three chapters are

dedicated to Lévi-Strauss's ideas on totemism, myths, 'savage mind', and shamanism. This is where the book comes closest to what it promises in the title, although unfortunately the discussion only glides over the surface of Lévi-Strauss's ideas on these issues. The sixth chapter, somewhat confusingly entitled 'The structure of nostalgia', briefly introduces Lévi-Strauss's political writings, his views on globalisation and cultural diversity, and his critique of evolutionist anthropology. To his credit, Tremlett does not scrutinise Lévi-Strauss's ideas in a vacuum, but also presents the arguments of some of his major critics.

Yet for all its comprehensiveness it is a somewhat disappointing book. Although Tremlett's emphasis is meant to be on the study of religion and his objective is to situate Lévi-Strauss's ideas in the context of current debates on religion, the book is actually just another general overview of Lévi-Strauss's work. Oddly, all the sources used in the survey are English translations; not a single text by Lévi-Strauss is cited in the original. According to Tremlett (p. 7), the book should be valuable to 'students of myth, shamanism, religion as a mode of thought and the anthropology of religion, structuralism, post-structuralism, anthropology and politics, phenomenology of religion', but to expect all this from a text of barely one hundred pages is unrealistic. It is a book for undergraduates, but even as such it remains rather superficial. Trying to cover too

much ground, it fails to provide a useful guide to Lévi-Strauss and to render his complex ideas graspable to a novice in social theory and anthropology. For someone already familiar with Lévi-Strauss's writing and core ideas, on the other hand, the book offers little new.

This does not mean that this overview is entirely lacking in noteworthy ideas or food for further thought. Tremlett's endeavour to show that structuralism is the product of particular circumstances in the history of Western thought, and as such not as neutral, value-free and objective as Lévi-Strauss suggests, is certainly praiseworthy. The author's attempt in the last chapter to blur the differences between structuralism and phenomenology, alleged opposites on the understanding-explanation continuum, is likewise laudable. It is a pity, however, that the discussion of these potentially interesting lines of thought remains very laconic.

Unlike Tremlett's account of Lévi-Strauss, Ivan Strenski's *Dumont on Religion: Difference, Comparison, Transgression* is not an itemised summary of the scholar's major texts but focuses on the main concepts addressed in Dumont's work, namely hierarchy, holism, value, individualism, and comparison. Considering that Dumont's contribution to the structuralist study of religion has been overshadowed by the reputation of Lévi-Strauss, the book is certainly welcome despite the fact that numerous accounts of Dumont's work already exist.

The book begins with a synopsis of what one can learn from Dumont and the discussion of the concept of 'hierarchy', his key to understanding religion and society, a way of looking at things, a means of 'encompassing of the contrary'. Strenski then goes on to explore Dumont's ideas on the individual and individualism. This move from hierarchy to individualism corresponds to the two major phases of Dumont's career. As Strenski (p. 56) says, in shifting his focus from hierarchy to individualism Dumont moved from ethnology and the Indian subcontinent to intellectual history and the West. More importantly, this shift of focus also marks Dumont's transcending of area studies to take up the comparative study of religion. Strenski further discusses the issue of comparison and Dumont's reluctance to 'remain caged within our own frame of reference'. The final chapter reconsiders the political and moral dimensions of Dumont's thought, linking his ideas to those of for example Tzvetan Todorov and Raymond Aron.

The book is a more rewarding read than Tremlett's, although not always a smooth one. Strenski (p. 40) admits that Dumont is not necessarily the clearest of writers; this weakness also seems to spill over into Strenski's own writing, which is occasionally repetitive and is not always well structured or coherent. Strenski (p. 2) claims that the purpose of this book is to secure Dumont's position as a 'key thinker' in the study of religion and to raise the level of recognition among stu-

dents of religion for Dumont's work. Consequently he positions himself – almost too vigorously, it seems – as an advocate and defendant of Dumont against some of his major critics. This can occasionally be confusing, if not disturbing. It seems somewhat out of place, for example, in a book introducing Dumont to a mainly undergraduate audience, to start with a long defence of Dumont against Roland Lardinois, one of his critics, and then repeatedly throughout the text return to these defensive arguments. Equally misplaced is Strenski's animated attempt to divorce Dumont's ideas from those of René Guénon, a French occultist who was allegedly one of his early influences, and to purposefully link Dumont to more 'respectable' scholars. It is true that Dumont's ideas on hierarchy, especially the caste system in India, and his seeming unwillingness to criticise it on moral grounds, have earned him a number of critics. But Strenski's repetitive efforts to invalidate all criticism of Dumont seem slightly forced, and can be counter-productive considering the main audience for whom the book was written.

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**Peter Beyer & Lori Beaman (eds):** *Religion, Globalization, and Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 608 pp.

Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman are professors of religious studies at the University of Ottawa, Canada. *Religion, Globalization, and Culture* is an edited collection of 28 articles on religion in a globalizing world; its contributors include many of the best-known sociologists of religion of our times. The book portrays a myriad of perspectives on the understanding and analysis of religious life beyond the nation-state and on a global scale. The volume is divided into four parts: theoretical perspectives, religious institutions and globalization, key issues in the relation of globalization and culture, and regional particularizations. The book forms volume six of the *International Studies in Religion and Society* series published by Brill.

In the introduction, Beyer and Beaman frame the book's main message as follows: 'Overall, the effect should be to allow the reader to appreciate just how little sense it makes to continue to try to understand either religion or globalization in today's world in some sort of splendid isolation from one another [...] Like capitalism and nation-state, religion and religiousness are an integral aspect of whatever we mean by globalization.' (P. 5) As a major contribution to the field, the book stands out as a religion-focused companion to Roland Robertson's and Kathleen White's six-volume *Globalization: Critical Concepts in*

Sociology (2003, Routledge), Frank Lechner's and John Boli's *The Globalization Reader* (2004, Blackwell) and Sanjeev Khagram's and Peggy Levitt's *The Transnational Studies Reader* (2008, Routledge) all of which include several texts on the same topics.

The first, theoretical part of the book contains articles by Roland Robertson, George M. Thomas, Meredith McGuire, Margit Warburg, José Casanova and John H. Simpson. Robertson was the first to provide an analysis of the global context with a focus on culture and religion, in his *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (1992, Sage). In the opening article of the present book, he writes of the millennial phase of globalization since 9/11, as a time when a religio-cultural dynamic has come to the forefront of global political events and in understanding an increasingly interconnected globe. The rest of the articles in this section challenge aspects of methodological nationalism associated with traditional secularization theories. George M. Thomas discusses the emergence of a world society and its impact on religion, while Meredith McGuire explores the roots of the notion of 'religion'. Margit Warburg looks at globalization and international migration, and the relationship between ethnicity and religion, through the history of Baha'is in Denmark. José Casanova proposes the notion of multiple modernities to better account for the public role of religion. Finally, John H. Simpson looks at religion as identity and its

contestations through Luhmannian lenses.

The authors of the following section, on religious institutions, are Bryan S. Turner, Peter Beyer, Gary D. Bouma, John Boli, David V. Brewington, James V. Spickard, Elisabeth Arweck and George Van Pelt Campbell. Turner provides a historical overview of the role of Christianity in colonialism, and how its success as a missionary religion depended on the ties between the two. With the decline of the West, Christianity will receive more global competition. The theme is continued by Peter Beyer, who develops his argument of the globalization of the western notion of 'religion' during colonial and imperial times. He argues that other religious traditions have emulated at least parts of the system, so that it is meaningful to speak of a global religious system. John Boli and David V. Brewington provide an outstanding case study of religious international non-governmental organisations (RINGOs). They show that the international civic system was born out of religious orders and mission societies, among others, and explore the forms this development has taken place over time and among different religions. The remaining articles discuss religious conflict (Bouma), religion in world culture (Spickard), new religious movements (Arweck) and phase models of globalization (Campbell).

The section on key issues consists of articles by Laurel Kearns, William A. Stahl, Otto Maduro, Michael

Wilkinson, Lori Beaman and James T. Richardson. Kearns discusses religion and ecology in a global context. Environmentalism is a truly global endeavour, where religious organizations are playing an important role. Given the environmental challenges of the future, this theme should receive more attention in the sociology of religion. William Stahl finds religious opposition to globalization in the Islamism of Osama bin Laden and the liberal Christianity of Dwight Hopkins. Common issues are related to opposition to western dominance, the disembedding of traditional cultural forms, relativism, displacement and commodification. Michael Wilkinson's case study on global Pentecostalism starts with a thorough discussion of global flows, network society and hybridity. Based on the ideas of Manuel Castells, his discussion of the structure of network society is welcome; this approach is not often applied to religion. The rest of the section's articles look at Latina/o Pentecostalism (Maduro), and the newly emerging role of national and international legal regimes, often focusing on human rights (Beaman, Richardson).

The final section, on regional perspectives, includes writings by Ole Riis, Nobutaka Inoue, Rubina Ramji, Shandip Saha, Enzo Pace, Afe Adogame, Vasilios Makrides and Paul Freston. Shandip Saha's text focuses on the globalization of Hindu gurus that took place during the colonial period and was amplified in the latter part of the twentieth

century, transforming Hinduism from within due to exposure to new contexts. Enzo Pace shows how the position of Christian communities has become increasingly difficult in the Arab world, because of internal pressures and emigration. Over half of the Assyrian, Armenian, Melchite, Maronite and Syriac-Orthodox Christians, for instance, have migrated from their homelands in the Middle East during the last fifty years. Afe Adogame presents a vivid picture of the vast area of religious changes in Sub-Saharan Africa, where indigenous religion, Islam and Christianity are recasting their relations together with the impact of the ever-growing African diaspora on the continent and elsewhere in the world. The other articles look at religious pluralism through the Mohammed cartoon controversy (Riis), the globalization of religion in Japan and Korea (Inoue), and Sufism in South Asia (Ramji), Europe (Makrides) and Latin America (Freston).

Like edited volumes in general, the voices are many and broader links between texts need to be woven. First, there is agreement that while the global condition has always existed, its importance has grown dramatically during the last few decades. Second, national dynamics no longer suffice to explain even local developments; rather, they should be placed on a continuum and looked at case by case to find the best level of analysis. Third, countries across the globe seem to share similar developments, or at least to be responding to similar

challenges. While these responses and their contexts vary greatly, the underlying mechanisms (global mobility, fluid capital, environmental issues, etc.) are interconnected, making the analysis more complex than earlier in both scope and dimension. Fourth, while most of the authors accept a form of the theory that modernization involves secularization, there are also many efforts either to recast the secularization narrative to suit a global context or to recast the whole notion.

The volume raises many issues that have not received wide attention in the sociology of religion. Beyond the basic idea of (western-type) religion now being a global phenomenon, some of the more promising directions seem to be related to network society, multiple modernities, environmentalism, RINGOs and the international law. Overall, *Religion, Globalization, and Culture* is a high-quality collection of contributions to the ongoing debate of religion in a globalizing world. Beyond its specific theme, it will serve well as a reader or as part of broader teaching materials on religion and globalization. The texts are a welcome reminder of the dangers of methodological nationalism, when research agendas are too narrowly built around national contexts. The book touches on many aspects of topical debates and opens up new directions for research in an expanding field.

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**Knut A. Jacobsen (ed.):** *South Asian Religions on Display: Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*. London: Routledge, 2008, 224 pp.

Different kinds of public processions, both religious and non-religious, play an important socio-cultural and political role in South Asia and in South Asian religions in diaspora. During recent decades the tightening grip of religion over politics has made processions increasingly prominent in the media and more generally in the public culture of the area. This is reflected in a growing interest in the subject among scholars concerned with the religions of South Asia. This volume, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Bergen, is the latest example of academic endeavours to grasp the changing role of public religious activities in South Asia and beyond. *South Asian Religions on Display* gives an excellent overview of the research done on religious processions in the South Asian cultural sphere. The main interest lies in India and Hinduism, although Pakistan, Islam and Sikhism also receive attention, as do manifestations of Hindu and Sikh processions in the diaspora. Some of the articles are based on anthropological field material, while others derive from historical and literary sources.

Studies of religious processions, pilgrimages and temple festivals have a great deal in common, and this family resemblance has been noted in Jacobsen's Introduction.

Processions, pilgrimages and festivals are all public expressions of religious affiliation, devotion and sacrality, and have wider political implications that have become ever more pressing in the increasingly globalised mediascape.

In the Introduction, the editor notes the dual nature of processions: simultaneously implying cosmological connectedness, *communitas*, sharing, transgression and ritual elevation, and acting as manifestations of hierarchy, distinction, social competition and political conflict. In South Asia, processions have to do with nationalism, politics, trade unions; they occur in connection with temple festivals, calendar festivals, marriages and funerals, and many other occasions. Whatever the occasion, a public procession is the name of the day. The difference between religious and non-religious processions in South Asia is nevertheless vague. Contemporary religious processions, such as those related to Durga puja in Kolkata, Kumbha Mela in Northern India (probably the most popular religious gathering in the world, estimated to have attracted 30 million people on the most auspicious day in 2001) and Ganesh Chaturdi in Mumbai, are all famous for large crowds, religious rivalries and confrontation, and the contestation of religious authority.

The articles in this volume show how religious processions in the area have historically quite commonly been syncretistic in nature, bringing together people of various religious denominations (see in particular the

fascinating article on the pre-modern practice of Muharram processions in India, by Hugh van Skyhawk). During the last few decades, however, syncretistic practices have become rare and public manifestations of religiosity have taken on a more sectarian nature. In the current political climate in the area it is very difficult to maintain syncretistic, regionally shared religious practices. The articles point out that present-day religious processions are not a reflection of a centuries old, stagnant tradition, but of continuously changing socio-religious phenomena (see particularly Mariam Abou Zahab on Muharram in Pakistan; Isabelle Clark-Decès on Dalits' role in Tamil funeral processions; Gregory Booth on changing wedding processions in North India; and James Lochtefield on the Kumbha Mela festival).

The most intriguing part of the book is that concerned with the contrasts between religious processions in South Asia and those arranged by South Asians in the diaspora. Hindu and Sikh processions in the diaspora do not stress status hierarchies and competition over symbolic space, in the way processions in South Asia commonly do. According to Jacobsen, diasporic processions aim at recognition of the diasporic identity and derive their meaning from the multicultural, plural society in which diasporic South Asians find themselves. The religious idiom is stressed as the interconnecting tie amongst migrant South Asians. Hinduism and Sikhism offer few congregational occasions which

might create a fertile ground for religious processions to take up a role in building a sense of community. Due to practical constraints, public processions related to life cycle rituals are difficult to arrange in Euro-American societies; thus the festival processions of South Asian communities are taking on ever greater importance as manifestations of religiosity and community. Jacobsen and other writers bring out succinctly the differences between religious processions in South Asia and among diasporic South Asians; these differences relate both to changing religious ideas and ideals and to the social roles of the diasporic communities.

Jacobsen has chosen to avoid paying explicit attention to the violence which has been foregrounded in the media coverage of religion in South Asia, as elsewhere in societies split by a religious divide. The writers have endeavoured to portray a more peaceful side of the processions. It is undoubtedly true that many religious processions in South Asia are carried out without violence or overt political tension. However, violence or at least its threat is among the important features of processions in present-day South Asia, which is one reason why most processions are considered unsuitable for women of repute to attend. This brings us to the aspect of gender, which has been completely disregarded in this volume. Religious processions are largely a male activity, and the gendered character of the processions would

have been quite an important point to consider.

The decision to include both diasporic and South Asian local practices in the same book is an excellent choice. This gives the book an edge and sharpens the approach. The articles on diaspora tend to end up in a rather straightforward outcome: processions are the groups' attempt to receive public recognition and to strengthen their community and identity. It would be interesting to go on to examine whether in some diasporic contexts migration leads to the privatization of religious practice, while in others it leads to the publicization of religion that is exemplified in the processions. It is notable that Sri Lankan Tamils, a refugee community, seem to be particularly prone to organizing public demonstrations of their religious practices (the articles by Brigitte Luchesi and Knut Jacobsen). In his excellent essay on the Festival of Chariots arranged by Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Durban, South Africa, P. Pratap Kumar goes deepest in analysing both the sacralising and the secular role of the public festival of a diasporic group. The old Hindu community of South Asian origin has turned to the neo-Hinduism of ISKCON in order to struggle against the perceived menace of Christian and Muslim conversion.

This edited volume is worth reading for anyone interested in the role of religion both in South Asia and among people of South Asian origin elsewhere. *South Asian Religions on*

*Display* is particularly rewarding for those who are preoccupied not only with South Asian religious traditions but also with social developments in the area, and generally for those who concerned with the relationships between politics, migration and religion. South Asia is among the most troubled areas in terms of religiously laden political conflicts. In the concluding chapter, Jacobsen nevertheless laments that religious processions have in recent decades been examined predominantly in a political frame of reference: the internal religious dynamism of processions and changes in religiosity have received surprisingly little attention. It remains to be seen whether the overtly politicized and conflict-oriented approach to religion in South Asia will start giving space to more culturalist interpretations of public religiosity. This important book signals the beginning of a more balanced approach to the study of religious processions.

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**Tomas Axelson:** *Film och mening: En receptionsstudie om spelfilm, filmpublik och existentiella frågor.* (Movies and Meaning: A reception study on fiction film, the film audience and existential matters.) Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2008, 281 pp.

Tomas Axelson's doctoral thesis, *Film och mening*, discusses whether and how fiction film can be used

as a resource in dealing with existential issues. The thesis is based on a survey (n=179), on two focus-group interviews dealing with one particular film (the science-fiction film *Contact*) and on thirteen individual interviews, dealing with the respondents' favourite movies. The main theoretical concepts are derived from socio-cognitive theory, more specifically schema theory. The thesis also features a theoretical discussion related to film theory and to the sociology of religion. Axelson is explicit in stating that the theoretical framework is not cognitive in the sense of drawing on neuropsychology.

The book is a thesis in the sociology of religion, but the approach is explicitly multidisciplinary. Since one function of a thesis is to demonstrate that its author has become adequately familiar with a particular field, this can clearly be a problem, and is so in Axelson's thesis as well. On the other hand, and this is more important, for a reader who approaches the book not as a test of learning in a particular field but as an introduction to issues on film and existential questions, its multidisciplinaryity is more of an asset than a drawback.

According to Axelson, the main purpose of the thesis is to present the empirical material; the theoretical discussion is secondary. I think this statement is commendable and realistic; the strength of the thesis lies in the interview material, particularly in the individual interviews. The theoretical discussion is not always

very clear. I find, for example, that the author seems to confuse substantive and functional definitions of religion, and fails to distinguish clearly between different levels of meaning, i.e. between 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' (Swedish 'mening' and 'betydelse').

There is a thorough and analytical discussion on methodology. The author clearly states that the survey did not yield many important results; it served mainly as a tool for identifying interviewees for the qualitative part of the study. He also reflects on how his own views on film may have influenced the interviews, but he does not take the opportunity to share some of these views with the readers; some comments on how he himself understands the content of the films discussed would have been of interest. This aspect now remains implicit in the brief summaries of the movie plots accompanying the interviews.

The most important and rewarding part of the book consists of the thirteen individual interviews, in which the respondents were young Swedish adults. They were asked to name one favourite film that had been important in influencing their outlook on life. In line with previous comments, I have to say that the theoretical underpinning introduced by the author does not to my mind greatly contribute to the discussion, which could have been even more interesting if it had been shaped according to the individual stories rather than according to a rather rigid theoretical structure. How-

ever, the discussion shows clearly how the individual respondents interpret the films in creative and imaginative ways, in particular how they relate the content of the films to their own personal experience. It is also interesting to note that the films that have had the greatest impact on the worldview of the interviewees are not the great art film classics but rather mainstream commercial films, such as *Dirty Dancing* or the Swedish film *Änglagård* (*House of Angels*). A generally positive aspect of Axelson's discussion of his results is the fact that he is quite clear and honest regarding results that did not turn out as he expected.

Although research on religion and popular culture seems to be more acceptable within a Nordic context today than it was some years ago, the field is still not very well represented in this part of the world. Axelson's book is thus an important contribution to an emerging field; with its focus on how films are interpreted and used by viewers, it contributes to the study of religion and film. It is my hope that it can serve to stimulate further studies in the field.

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