

**Collins-Mayo, Sylvia and Pink Dandelion (eds.). 2011. *Religion and Youth (Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective Series in Association with the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group)*. Surrey and Burlington: Ashgate. 302 pp. Pb.: £16.19. ISBN: 9780754667681.**

Affected by the worldwide processes of globalisation, lived worlds, including the religious aspect, have gone through drastic changes. Young people tend to absorb, produce and represent on-going socio-cultural transformations. *Religion and Youth* is an ambitious interdisciplinary publication that offers comprehensive information about the central aspects concerning the contemporary situation.

The volume covers twenty-seven articles by scholars from various academic fields (sociology, religion studies, educational studies, theology, anthropology, criminology, psychology, and Latin American studies). The contents are laid out in six thematic sections. Old and new methodological perspectives are introduced in parts: I (*Generations and their Legacy*) and VI (*Researching Youth Religion*). Through a macro-level survey of research, the articles give an idea of the large processes in few western countries in Part II (*The Big Picture: Surveys of Belief and Practice*). Some insights into micro-level individual religious experiences are also present in Part III (*Expression*). Moreover, the discussion of the most outstanding theoretical issues concerning the modern religious field, such as identity and faith transmission, are included in Parts IV (*Identity*) and V (*Transmission*).

Sylvia Collins-Mayo, one of the two editors, opens the discussion in the introductory text about the widely studied secularisation theme by asking the fundamental question: if young people are less religious than before or if some new substituting forms of spiritualities exist (p. 2). Looking for answers to this question Flory and Miller describe current youth religiosity as “expressive communalism”, a contemporary form of spirituality that underlines simultaneously individual experience and search for sense of belonging (ch. 1, pp. 9–15). The article also points out another important factor: multiple influences of new digital media in religious worldviews among contemporary youth. Furthermore, Beckford summarises the central aspect considering digital media and religion in the volumes foreword: ‘it can foster *bricolage* and the creation of do-it-yourself types of religion and spirituality that manage to combine intense subjectivity with emergent collective identities’ (p. xxiii).

Traditionally, the sociology of religion has based its analysis on the generational or cohort group studies that are introduced and discussed in the volume from different perspectives by Flory and Miller; Collins-Mayo and Beaudoin; Voas; Lynch. Voas points out that the key concepts in sociological youth religion studies, such as generation and cohorts, are complex terms and not always applied in similar ways among scholars. He also reminds readers that emerging demographic alterations can also influence religious change in modern societies, in addition to variation among cohorts (pp. 26–27). Lynch continues even further and criticises the whole of traditional generation studies, suggesting that fragmented contemporary societies should be researched, not only horizontally by looking through the vast cohort groups, but also vertically, by giving more attention to gender, class, sexual orientation and migration phenomena (p. 37). As the quantitative

method has strong roots in sociology of religion, it gains one whole section in the volume (Part II). Other methodological approaches are also included in Part VI, about sensitivity in field research (Collins-Mayo and Rankin), different levels on participation (Abramson) and the gender perspective (Aune and Vincett). Interesting qualitative visual method is also introduced in the article by Dunlop & Richter.

Sometimes, the quantitative method is indeed the only way when the aim is to get a large sample of data. However, as the authors often admit, there exist some difficulties when interpreting and making conclusions through this type of research material. Frequently, the survey settings narrow the possibilities to observe cultural details, and can lead the research to a quite different conclusion compared to the situation where qualitative fieldwork would be included. As our contemporary societies are evermore multicultural, penetrated by global socio-political processes, the study of religion should definitely go, as much as possible, to the grass-root level and concentrate in defining the contextual settings, as it is in these changing local settings that contemporary religious and spiritual ideas emerge and are put into action.

The contents of this volume ably represent some parts of the Western world, with details from England, Wales, USA, Australia, Scandinavia and even from South Africa and Brazil. Still it largely lacks a “non-western” presence. However, Pirjo K. Virtanen’s article delights the reader with its geographical focus on young Amazonian Indians in Brazil. Virtanen finds that shamanic practices are the most powerful instruments in creating and building social networks among local native youth. In many non-Western cultures, the impacts of Western politics, market forces and cultural influences are as apparent as they are in the West. Moreover, in many cases it is exactly through this kind of processes that people become more interested of their own ethnic or national origins. Hence, for emigrants in the West and for post-colonial country citizens back in their homelands, religious aspects seem to continue as an important factor in the construction of contemporary identities.

Concluding the journey with the scholars in *Religion and Youth*, Pink Dandelion affirms that in the West young people differ crucially from their parents in questions of religion and spirituality and consequently there exists a radical difference in the construction of religiosity compared to the earlier generations. Secularisation seems to exist primarily in relation to traditional religious institutions, and accessibility to digital technology has a profound influence in the processes of youth spirituality. Moreover, new forms of spirituality reflect neo-liberal consumerism and the search for new communities.

Because of the global inter-connections between and within cultures, it would be intriguing to look more extensively across the geographical and cultural borders, by means of understanding the dynamics between local cultural differences, globally recognisable religious-like ideas and globally spread influences in the religious phenomena.

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