NEOLIBERAL RELIGION: FAITH AND POWER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY by Mathew Guest, *Bloomsbury*, London, 2022, pp. x + 203, £21.99 pbk

Apart from the toxicity surrounding gender and identity politics, few other areas than religion present themselves as so unsettling to contemporary sociology. With 37% of the population of England and Wales in the Census 2021 indicating as of 'no religion', with its supposed extinction in the mass media, the triumph of secularity, and assigned to the dustbins of sociology as of no definition, somehow religion persists as unburied, its ghost lurking unwanted at the doors of modernity. Postsecularism signified sociology's worries that the celebration of the death of religion was premature. The persistent presence of Islam, the amalgam of theology and sovereignty which shaped Russian invasion of the Ukraine, and anxieties arising from covid added to worries that religion was not quite extinct. Somehow, sociology has been forced to move out of its comfort zones dealing with classification and categorisation of religion into issues of the beliefs and identities it generates. Unexpectedly, religion colours an unfolding *Zeitgeist*. As chairman of the British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group and as head of Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Durham, Guest occupies an almost unique intersectional position to discern these perplexing times.

It is not that little effort has been made to interpret these unsettlements; indeed, quite the opposite. The Internet has opened out endless websites for nerds to gather. These range from improbable postings on beer, boredom, and burqas where in the plethora religion is a beneficiary. It too has many sites ranging from those of the Jedi and Satanists even to religious orders that make their own postings. Unexpectedly, the sociology of religion is the beneficiary of this expansion for it supplies much needed critical narratives and contextualisations that better aid the reading of the signs of the times. But there is a price to be paid, of choice, of which form of religion is worthy of faith and commitment and which contains a power to deceive or to be true. All this is not new. What is new are the prospects of engulfment that risks paralysis.

Reflecting its opacity, and even more opaque than culture, in sociology religion has many adjectival attachments, ranging from the implicit, the invisible, the virtual to the digital, notably in Google versions. To write in this area risks generating a companion text of exclusions. Guest follows this necessity, by removing religious organisations, myths, and rituals from the concerns of his study. Less warranted is a narrow reading of Weber that excludes his interests in salvation and theodicy. These are sacrificed to draw out the economic facets of his Protestant Ethic. Seeking to move past what he rightly considers the ossification of secularisation, Guest sets religion in the context of capitalism, individualism, and

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sovereignty, but especially consumerism in terms of a marketplace. These are the properties of his neoliberalism most aptly applied to his interests in Evangelical Christianity, especially in the United States. The scope for misuses of power and designation amply affirms the notion of a marketplace where spiritual wares are sold. Less persuasive, in chapter 5, is his sympathetic interest in Islam, as a victim of state regulation in the United Kingdom. This polar opposite, which seems an orphan in the context of his neoliberalism, suffers what Guest terms state securitization. Fundamentalism attributed to both Evangelical Christianity and Islam sits uneasily in the notion of a liberal market.

Nevertheless, as a means of finding a narrative in a chaos, in chapters 1–2, Guest provides numerous apt examples to illustrate the diversity of the market place of religion in the U.S. There is a fruitful pairing of concerns with populism in chapter 3 and chapter 4 dealing with religion in a post-truth era. Lurking is the issue of the power to deceive, to manipulate and to deal in what is covered by his innovative reference to the cosmetic where images are crafted to generate sensibilities of happiness. These prospects are well covered in chapter 6 on religion and the entrepreneurial self. This leads on nicely to the selling of a self, one directed to youth and gender well treated in chapter 7 on power and religious difference where the cosmetic is given a more extended treatment (pp. 134–43). A notably useful chapter 8 on the complexities surrounding secularism and non-religious in neoliberalism drifts towards the prospects of the moral engagement by hitching sociology to the prospects of multiculturalism and the tolerance this generates.

Guest makes an alluring reference to the idea that 'bad religion sells better than good religion' (p. 169). This opens out a whole new set of expectations for sociology to make distinctions and judgements that makes the border between religion and theology blurred. Recognising this need, in the final chapter Guest abdicates the idea of Berger' s notion of 'methodological atheism', that sociologists should place in brackets their own religious beliefs. Thus, that of the beyond is to be sacrificed to the demands of empirical investigation. Almost inadvertently, Guest drifts to the issue of the sociologist's own beliefs, the concerns of chapter 9.

The puzzle of the study can be traced to its cover image. It is a Jesus image, superimposed on a dollar bill supplied by Graffiti artwork. Doubtless, its use is to reflect the rise of prosperity Gospel which is very much a trait of some forms of American Evangelism and therefore accurately reflects the interests of the study in neoliberalism as facilitating a deregulated marketplace where all forms of Protestantism are the beneficiaries. These leave other forms of Christianity vulnerable to iconoclasm in ways unthinkable in relation to Islam. It would be inconceivable for the study to sail under a similar image of the prophet Mohammed to appear on the cover of this book.

Though alert, engaged, and soaking up the immediate with credible talent, there is a flaw in the study that it is a victim of what it discounts in

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the final chapter: the power to structure and to organise. This refers to the power to structure and to exclude which Guest attributes to white, male Christians (p. 181). He declares himself a Quaker, and this shapes his desire to emancipate the entrapped, the victims of deception and power structures, and this ambition forms his vision of the ethical responsibility of future sociology of religion.

Some time ago, the French Protestant philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, noted the way religion is often treated in terms of a hermeneutic of suspicion, with much less recognition devoted to the hermeneutic of faith. That bias envelops Guest's work, where Islam is granted a hermeneutic of faith and Christianity a hermeneutic of suspicion. The neoliberalism of the study is structured to present Christianity in self-evident deceptive forms peculiar to the United States. That struggle with Protestantism in the marketplace was brilliantly caught earlier in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood,* of the terrible end of Hazel Motes who sought to place his own religion of non-belief in the marketplace where many preachers sought to sell their wares. In the chaos of deceits, Motes ended up blinding himself to see better.

The subtitle and the concerns with the retrieval of ethics in the last chapter suggest appeal to beyond the excellent miniatures on populism, the burqa, and the mega churches of Evangelicalism in the U.S.A., to some bigger picture for sociology of religion to paint. Missing is any attention on Christian theology itself. The centring of Islam as a domain concern of the sociology of religion in the United Kingdom has always been puzzling. Guest's interest in Evangelical churches can be seen as an outgrowth of fixation on cults and sects which defined the sociology of religion in the 1990s. Likewise, fascination with Islam can be treated as part of a sociology of redress and redemption of victimhood and marginality. But these interests disguise differences between Islam and Christianity over which religion is authentic in terms of revelation and safe passages for salvation. These are by no means dispensable, especially as Weber's Protestant Ethic was concerned with the resolution of salvation anxiety and Bourdieu's interests were in naming in the context of the market for salvation goods. Christianity never needed to develop an equivalent to Islamophobia. It had its own powers and source of Redemption to address. Victimhood forms a virtue in Christianity, sometimes an index of faith in ways that baffle proponents of identity politics.

It might well be claimed that Islam has been structured out of existence in the secular university, but this is nothing like the fate of Christianity especially in the sociology of religion. This might seem a form of special pleading with no warrant. Yet, an outsider might wonder how the Other elsewhere is awarded ethical recognition, when some 100 miles West of Durham a conflict in Northern Ireland, derived from Catholicism and Protestantism, with over 3,000 dead, over fifty years, attracts no similar scrutiny and sympathy as given to Islam in this study. The failure to connect to Catholicism, bar a handful of references in the study, leaves notions of power lopsided, and pay no attention to Weber's notion of

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sacramental charisma, which also fascinated Bourdieu. These point to capacities rather than incapacities, choices directed to enablement not disablement. Concentration on the bizarre range of beliefs and practices of American Evangelicalism, now complicated by conspiracies and the political endorsements of Trump do legitimise concerns with power and deception, but in ways that distort wider understandings of Christianity, especially Catholicism.

Guest seems to treat Islam as all too credible to degree to which Evangelical Christianity is incredible. Concerns with power play to sociological strengths but in ways which generate a reductionism in deference to the credibility of power at odds with interests in faith. In that sense, the title of the study is divided against itself. The problem is that interest in faith requires reference to theology in ways that accentuate a sense of its absence in treatments of religion. This stimulating and rich study takes matters to a fruitful edge of conjecture for the sociology of religion and thus has much to be commended.

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ON DIVINE REVELATION: THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH I by Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange OP, translated by Matthew K. Minerd with introduction by Cajetan Cuddy, OP, *Emmaus Academic*, Steubenville (Ohio), 2022, vol. I, pp. 856, $59.95, hbk
ON DIVINE REVELATION: THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH II by Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange OP, translated by Matthew K. Minerd, *Emmaus Academic*, Steubenville (Ohio), 2022, vol. II, pp. 656, $59.95 hbk

It is uncommon to write a book review on a book that was first published in 1918. However, an abiding interest in the work and thought of the French Dominican philosopher and theologian Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange OP (1877-1964) led professor Minerd to translate the last authorized Latin edition of the friar's *De Revelatione per Ecclesiam Catholicam proposita* of 1950 into English and publish it in two volumes. Garrigou-Lagrange's work is a classic but above-standard university Thomistic interpretation of fundamental theology in its scope and speculative level. Thanks to its precise fidelity to the original text (including quotations with adequate explanatory notes), this translation retains its contemporary character and is thus both a source of an inspiring doctrine and a document of its time. The work has hitherto been known in English only in an abridged and revised version of Thomas Joseph Walshe's *The Principles of Catholic Apologetics* published in 1926.

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