

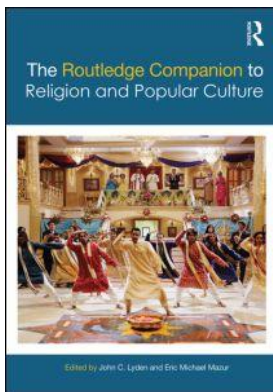
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CONVERSATIONS AND CONFESSIONS

Who's writing about this, and why?

Eric Michael Mazur

That which hath been is that which shall be, and that which hath been done is that which shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:9

[R]emember, no matter where you go, there you are.

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension (1984)

In the spring of 1996, three graduate students collaborated on a proposal for a paper to be delivered at the annual meeting of the association of their intended profession. The conference “call for papers” asked for proposals investigating religion on television, and the three—who had spent the previous few years discussing (over burritos and beer) the presence and role of religion on the Fox animated television program *The Simpsons* (1989–present)—figured they had nothing to lose. To their amazement, the proposal was accepted. After spending the summer writing, one of the three delivered the paper (which they called “Franken-paper” because of how it was stitched together) that, as it turned out, was fairly well received. In the 17 years since, that paper has been published in two editions of a collection of essays on religion and popular culture (Mazur and McCarthy 2001/2011), excerpted in another (Lehman *et al.* 2005), and cited broadly in the emerging “field” of religion and *The Simpsons* (see Heit 2008; Pinsky 2001).¹

It is probably not too surprising to learn that this is my story. I was one of those graduate students—along with Lisle Dalton and Monica Siems—but it could have been the story of almost anyone working in the field of religion and popular culture in the 1990s. Seeming to converge (or at least to coincide) in the second half of the twentieth century, a number of factors played a seminal role in the transformation of various traditional academic lines of inquiry, creating energy for the study of the relationship of religion and popular culture. Kate McCarthy and I (2011: xvi–xvii) suggest “the Marxian influence on the study of history,” developments in the field of social history, and the growing interest in material culture; Lynn Schofield Clark (2008) suggests feminist studies; without a doubt there are others. In their own ways (and for

their own disciplinary reasons), various areas of the academy encouraged scholars to pay greater attention to issues of class, consumerism, material culture, and cultural production, and challenged and de-centered traditional power narratives (including those about culture and cultural production), even as fields such as anthropology elevated their fascination with “the local” and others, such as media studies, emphasized the means of communicating ideas, symbols, and images of cultural authority, and recognized the role of the audience in receiving (and interpreting) those ideas.

But my story of “Franken-paper” also illuminates another important source of energy that seemed to propel the investigation of the relationship of religion and popular culture to its present state: the biographies of those working in the field.² This has always been the case—whether they acknowledge it or not, it is most likely that people have always been motivated to study that which has had the greatest resonance in their own minds or hearts—but what made it different this time around was the kind of experience—particularly as it relates to religion and culture in the English-speaking world, particularly in the United States—that these authors and scholars shared. Ritual theorist Catherine Bell (1992: 5) reminds us that “critical analysis of a theoretical perspective must look not only to the logic of the set of ideas under scrutiny, but also to the history of their construction,” suggesting that, in addition to seeking the solution to an intellectual riddle (such as the relationship between religion and popular culture, for example), we must also ask how the riddle itself came to be formed—as she puts it, “a deconstruction of the historical definitions of the problem or issue and a delineation of the circumstances under which the problem has been *a problem for us*” (ibid.; emphasis in the original). So our immediate question is not when did the relationship between religion and popular culture develop, but why has it become such a vibrant field lately?

The question “when did this begin?”—the “first order” question one considers in investigating the relationship between religion and popular culture—produces answers that depend on the investigation’s perspective. Among the chapters in this volume, contributors focusing on specific religious traditions address (in some form) when and how popular culture became a “problem” for these traditions.³ Those focusing on specific forms of popular culture are more likely to see the “problem” as rooted in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with the rise of processes of mass mediation and communication.

But these two forms of analysis—the one that investigates how popular culture relates to a specific religious tradition, and the other that investigates how religion relates to a specific form of popular culture—either assume (as a given) or pass over (as too subjective) the self-reflective question posed by Bell. In the following, we will seek an answer to the question about when the relationship of (any) religion and (any form of) popular culture became an issue such that we (as a society, as a profession, or as individuals) felt the need to study it: the “second order” question about the questioning of the relationship of religion and popular culture.

A time for every purpose ...

There is a story told about atomic scientist Robert Oppenheimer who, upon seeing the mushroom cloud of the first atomic bomb being tested in New Mexico, thought

to himself “I am become death, destroyer of worlds,” quoting Lord Krishna from the Bhagavad-Gita (see Hijiya 2000). The fact that Oppenheimer could quote the Hindu narrative is not particularly remarkable, given his personal upbringing. What is noteworthy is that there is no record of his remembering having said this in the 20 years before 1965. While it is unlikely that this omission was made consciously, it might also be unlikely that its recollection was coincidental. But even if the story is apocryphal, it illustrates nonetheless the dramatic change that had occurred in American society between 1945 and 1965 such that—as it relates to this story—a Jewish physicist could recall in 1965 (and share with others) thinking of a line from a Hindu sacred text, when in 1945, at one of the most important moments of American scientific history (and likely, his academic career), he could not.

There is nothing particularly magical about the year 1965.⁴ But there is little doubt that “the 1960s,” however we define it, represent a significant period of transformation in American society. Sociologist of religion Robert Wuthnow (1998) broadly traces the changing nature of religion in American society across the twentieth century, from which we can draw three generational stages. In the first stage, Wuthnow examines the impact immigration had on American culture from the end of the nineteenth century to World War I. Migrants from largely non-Protestant, non-English speaking cultures came to this country in increasingly large numbers, transforming American cities which had only recently outpaced rural agrarian society as the engine of American culture and commerce. Forming (or enhancing) urban ethnic enclaves, these immigrants of the beginning of the twentieth century gave birth to the steady, practical-minded “dwellers” of mid-century—our second stage, the joiners who sought to remove vestiges of their ethnic heritage by blending in to American dominant (that is, largely white Protestant) culture. Their own children—our third stage, the so-called “baby boomers” of the post-World War II generation (those born between 1948 and 1963, approximately)—were not only great in number, but were financially better off than their parents (or certainly their grandparents) had been at the same age, and felt less compelled to adhere to the standards established by their government (who was sending them to Vietnam), their religious leadership (who often supported the fight against Communism, or who seemed to hesitate in the fight over changing race and gender roles), and their parents (whose “purchase” into suburban consumerism seemed spiritually bankrupt). Feeling betrayed by the traditional institutional sources of social authority, these “seekers” sought new sources of meaning-construction and maintenance. In his own investigation, Wade Clark Roof (1993) measures the impact of the 1960s on this cohort by defining them not only by their birth year but also by exposure to three types of experience he considers elemental for those transformed by this era: attendance at a rock concert, participation in a protest, and the use of marijuana. Through these experiences—the experiences of group effervescence found in a rock concert, the empowerment of social protest, and the physical (or even spiritual) liberation of getting high—the new generation of “seekers” found what they felt they needed. Coincidentally, a change in federal law permitting greater immigration from non-European countries (most profoundly India, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Turkey) brought American youth face to face with leaders and practitioners of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in ways that had not been possible before (Melton 1993). New sources of

meaning-construction and -maintenance were, it seems, in great abundance for those who sought it in the 1960s.

Phillip Hammond (1992) chronicles how these changes in American society created an environment wherein young people felt greater freedom to distance themselves from the religious attachments into which they were born, a phenomenon he calls the “third disestablishment”; the liberation of the individual from the historic, ascriptive nature of traditional religious identity.⁵ Individuals for whom Roof’s indicators (rock concerts, protests, and marijuana) were of greater importance—particularly, Hammond discovers, those who (as adults) lived in larger metropolitan areas—found themselves later in life much more likely to belong to a religious community different from the one of their birth, or none at all.

For sociologists, this transformation signaled a “restructuring of American society” (Wuthnow 1988) wherein denominational allegiances were based more on ideology than theology (see Hunter 1991); for theologians, it marked either the challenge of finding God in the “secular city” (see Cox 1965), or the “death of God” (see Murchland 1967; Elson 1966). One of those “death of God” theologians, Gabriel Vahanian (1967: 4), lamented the loss of “sacramental significance” and the “transcendental dimension” in the world; philosopher Eugene Borowitz (1967: 93) concluded that “[m]odern man is secular and happily so.”

But it would be a terrible mistake to see the period since the 1960s as defined by a lack of religiosity. As I have noted elsewhere (Mazur 2013: 150–51), we can find evidence of continued (or even growing) interest in things religious by examining something as mundane as the historical record of “gospel” publishing in the United States. Between 1815 and 1965, a different imprint of one of the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) was published every year; between 1965 and 2011, that average doubled.⁶ During the same period, the number of “gospels” according to entirely non-biblical figures (the Beatles, Harry Potter, Bruce Springsteen, Oprah Winfrey, etc.) exploded; six were published between 1815 and 1965 (0.04 per year), while nearly 80 were published between 1965 and 2011 (1.74 per year).⁷

Despite what some (see Carter 1993; Neuhaus 1984) have argued, what diminished was not the presence of religion in society, but the authority of a particular form of religion in society. Many (if not most) Americans remained deeply committed to institution-based Christianity, or to the religious identity of their parents (the religious identity of their youth). But the 1960s ushered in an era of religious experimentation, religious pluralism, and individual religious freedom of expression in a manner much like other periods of (American) religious revitalization (see McLoughlin 1978). What shifted (if only slightly) was the monopoly enjoyed by institution-based forms of Christianity (but also, to a lesser extent, Judaism) in the lives of many Americans. More Americans than at any time in this country’s history were becoming “serially” affiliated (moving from one denomination to the next with relative ease), or institutionally unaffiliated, or were converting from one major religious tradition to another, or were non-Christian to begin with, and more Americans than at any time in this country’s history were many things, or were not any one thing—what Roof *et al.* (1995: 245–46) call “cafeteria religion” or “religion à la carte”—or were not anything.⁸

In his analysis of the “death of God” theology, sociologist (and rabbi) Will Herberg (1966a: 771) argues that the theologians lamented the fact that “whatever meaning

and relevance God may once have had, He has now lost this meaning and relevance for modern man.” He concludes that modern man “may abandon Christian faith, and lose his Christian consciousness” (an odd lament from a rabbi, to be sure) “but that only means that the spiritual void will be filled with a legion of modern idolatries, some of them almost too weird to describe” (1966b: 840). As if in horror, Borowitz (1967: 92) exclaims: “theology threatens to become popular!”

A lot of money can be lost betting on the future of religion in America; Thomas Jefferson once prognosticated that Unitarianism would be “the religion of the majority from north to south” (Jefferson 1822). Herberg and Borowitz—probably like most religious thinkers of their era—calculated that the trends they saw in the mid-1960s would lead to religious chaos. And some of what developed was (more than likely) beyond their imagination—“too weird to describe”—or the imagination of the Christian (that is, mostly Protestant) American religious establishment. By the end of the 1960s, African-American liberation theology (Cone 1969), Latin-American liberation theology (Gutiérrez 1973), feminist theology (Daly 1973), and neo-Pagan theology (Starhawk 1979) were “popular,” and within another decade, so too would be eco- and gay theology. Even mainstream theologians were getting into the act; a *New York Times* reporter specifically cited Jürgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* (1967) as part of the movement away from the “God is Dead” theology (see Fiske 1968).

In the world of commerce, competition flourishes in an environment where there is no monopoly. Sociologists of American religion (see Finke and Iannoccone 1993; Finke and Stark 1992), applying the same model, have provided us with a way of understanding religious growth.⁹ With the removal of Christianity as the legally established religion (the “first” disestablishment, embodied in the ratification of the US Constitution’s First Amendment), its subsequent loss of monopoly in social privilege (the “second” disestablishment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), and ultimately the loss of social authority for institution-based religious affiliation and identity (Hammond’s “third” disestablishment), alternative forms of religion and religious expression began to flourish.¹⁰ A common thread connecting many of these alternative forms of religious expression was the basic impulse for spiritual fulfillment—including what has often been identified as the “spiritual but not religious” phenomenon in American culture. Roof, Hammond, and others suggest that what was once a paired experience—people who were religious felt that they were spiritual, and vice versa—had for many now become separate. People who went to, affiliated with, joined, or identified with a specific (usually traditional, non-marginalized) institution-based form of spirituality were “religious”; those who did not were “spiritual.” Robert Bellah *et al.* (1985) portray the ultimate “seeker” as one for whom the journey to self-discovery is the primary spiritual motivation, a position he and his co-authors identify as “Sheila-ism” (after the study subject whom they had given the pseudonym “Sheila”). These seekers became seekers of spirituality in all forms, from alternative forms of institutional religions to individual pursuits to nature to ... well, almost any form of experience (see Wuthnow 1998). And these seekers became, at least initially (and, it seems, overwhelmingly), the foundation for much of the new energy in the study of the relationship between religion and popular culture.

God saw the light, that it was good ...

As difficult as it is to believe sometimes, scholars are products of the societies into which they are born—as much as those they study. This means that, at the very least, those scholars born between 1948 and 1963—particularly if they protested something, attended rock concerts, and smoked marijuana—would have been as susceptible to the cultural influences (including those on religion) as any of Roof's other “seekers,” and those born later would have inherited the same world as the post-“boomer” generations (“Generation X,” “Millennials,” etc.). It also means that even those scholars little affected by Roof's experiential “hat trick” would still occupy—and thus be confronted with—an American society filled with those who had.

If this is the case, it may provide us with at least one possible explanation for transformations not only in religion and religious experience since the 1960s, but also in the ways in which religion and religious experience are studied—largely because those who are doing the studying have been affected by the same influences (positively or negatively) as those they study. And there is evidence suggestive of this conclusion. In 1963, the US Supreme Court ruled that not only was there a constitutionally significant difference between studying religion and studying about religion, but there was also a lacuna in one's education if the latter was absent. As Justice Clark noted for the Court, “one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization” (*Abington v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 [1963], at 225). The following year (1964), the premier scholarly association for those engaged in the academic study of religion (the American Academy of Religion) was founded, and over the course of the decade—at publicly financed state colleges and universities—so too were a number of departments of religious studies and comparative religion, dedicated to the academic study about religion, as opposed to the theological analysis (or confessional defense) of it.

Not surprisingly, scholarship investigating the world of religion and popular culture was strongly affected by the shifts noted above in how people approached religion and religious experience. A hint of this can be found by comparing the categories used to describe that relationship suggested in 1951 by Protestant theologian H. Richard Niebuhr—“Christ against culture,” “the Christ of culture,” “Christ above culture,” “Christ and culture in paradox,” and “Christ the transformer of culture”—with those suggested in 2000 by Bruce Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (2000: 10–18)—“religion in popular culture,” “popular culture in religion,” “popular culture as religion,” and “religion and popular culture in dialogue.” Neither parallel nor in direct opposition, these terms suggest different presumptions on the part of the scholars employing them. The mid-century Protestant theologian Niebuhr is, undoubtedly, speaking theologically to a receptive (or at least familiar), primarily Christian audience; the twenty-first century scholars Forbes and Mahan—both ordained ministers, as it turns out—are likely responding to their mid-century forebear, but are speaking to a broader audience, using broader (and decidedly more secular) terms.

Mahan (2007: 49) identifies a specific work—from 1965, as it turns out—as one of the “precursors to the wider scholarly conversation about religion and popular

culture.” It was a slim volume by Presbyterian minister Robert Short, who “thought faith was best when it was subtle and most accessible when it seemed almost trivial” (Sanders 2009). Written “with the blessing of Peanuts creator Charles Schulz,” *The Gospel According to Peanuts* mined the popular comic strip for common Christian themes based on the presumption that the comic was “written as moral instruction” by Schulz, and thus could be “analyzed as scriptural literature” by Short (Ahrens 1997). The work, which sold more than ten million copies in seven different languages (Sanders 2009), was not universally acclaimed at first; one contemporary reviewer noted that Short had read too much into the cartoon (Hakes 1965), and American religious historian Martin Marty noted that “this idea of mixing popular culture and the Bible” made people nervous (Sanders 2009). But the volume’s introduction was written by Nathan Scott, a pioneer in the field of religion and literature whose work, according to Mahan (2007: 48–49), “drew our attention to the relationships between religion and art.”¹¹ And its effects were long lasting; David Dobson, Short’s editor, concluded that the author-theologian, who explored the theological significance of the comic, had “really invented the study of religion through popular culture” (Sanders 2009).

Ye shall know them by their fruits ...

Since then, the scholarly world of religion and popular culture has grown tremendously—“almost silly with the exploration” of the topic (Mazur and McCarthy 2011: xvii). Members of the American Academy of Religion established a special unit for the study of religion and popular culture in the 1990s—as the “baby boomers” were coming into positions of institutional power—only slightly ahead of the appearance of a number of scholarly journals dedicated to the study of religion and popular culture (or some aspect thereof).¹² Work continues with great enthusiasm exploring the relationship of religion and popular culture generally, through the lens of a specific religious tradition, or through the lens of a specific form of popular culture—as our contributors map out in the other chapters in this volume.

As more work has been produced, clusters seem to have formed around three general categories. The first—from a theologically conservative perspective—consists of works that are critical of popular culture generally or some aspect of it specifically, seeing it as a threat to a particular community, or to larger society. This is the oldest model—as I noted above, the voices of the religious have long warned believers of the temptations of the world—but it is one that widened significantly in the 1980s and early 1990s with the mobilization of various “family values”-motivated organizations and individuals, including such non-religious groups as the Parents’ Music Resource Center (see Persley 2007) and individual representatives such as film critic Michael Medved (see especially Medved 1992).

Not all work from a religious perspective has been critical of popular culture, however, as Short’s pioneering work on the Peanuts cartoon proved. In 2000, in honor of the 35th anniversary of its initial publication, Westminster John Knox Press, the institutional descendant of the original publisher, rereleased Short’s book, inaugurating a series of books exploring the “gospel according to” a wide

variety of subjects, including (just from this one publisher): America, the Beatles, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Disney, Harry Potter, Hollywood, Oprah Winfrey, science fiction, the Simpsons, *Star Wars*, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the novel *Twilight*. Works by theologians broadly representative of an academic perspective (including works by a number of contributors to this volume) rather than by those from a specifically affiliated faith community, and also by scholars with clear (but usually moderate) theological positions, have continued Short's trajectory of bringing critical but positive theological method to their analysis.

This volume (like others) amply illustrates the third category, which is populated with contributions by scholars more traditionally trained in the humanities and social sciences. These scholars have produced a steady flow of work over the past 25 years or so examining the religion and popular culture nexus motivated not only by the social changes of the 1960s, but also by many of the disciplinary shifts mentioned earlier in this chapter. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and religion scholars have published work, long and short, in great abundance, in response to the expansion in scholarly interest, but also sparking it. Some of these works have found an audience in college classrooms, largely based on their ability to showcase the use of method in the service of intellectual inquiry, retain student interest based on their contemporary relevance, and appeal to instructors who feel more at home with the topic and its approach.

Standing idle in the marketplace

A 2007 essay by Lynn Schofield Clark outlining the intellectual history of the field bore the title "Why study popular culture?"—a question that those of us who have been engaged in the field have had to face regularly, from our colleagues as well as from our own consciences. Her subtitle—"How to build a case for your thesis in a religious studies or theology department"—was even more to the point. Without actually reading the essay, one becomes aware of several important aspects of the field of religion and popular culture: first, it is a relatively young field (it must be, otherwise graduate students would not need instructions for how to get their thesis proposals accepted); and second, largely because of point 1, it is still (or was still, as of 2007) a field in need of defending. In part, this is due to the social and intellectual transformations outlined above. As the years pass, more departments are supporting masters' theses and doctoral dissertations exploring the relationship between religion and popular culture; the advancing seniority of sympathetic faculty—and the eventual retirement of the unsympathetic—has certainly helped. Nonetheless, a good number of older scholars in this area of study are "second fielders"—scholars trained in other fields or specialties but more recently arrived in the field. They (we!) are either self-taught in the ways of popular cultural analysis, re-mappers of familiar method onto new data sets—I often define what I do as "spontaneous cultural archaeology"—or interdisciplinary innovators blending fields without regard to disciplinary boundaries. Nonetheless, many of us keep one foot in a field that "feels" more scholarly.¹³

It may also be that, to some extent, the study of the relationship between religion and popular culture remains in need of defending because of the existence of a

fourth category of published work. This fourth category draws from the other three but also from beyond them. It also increases the visibility of materials produced in this area; that is, it drives the market as much as the theological and scholarly merit of the other three categories. I (and many others, most likely) consider it “schlock”: garbage.¹⁴ This is work with such little scholarly merit as to be unmistakably, almost objectively bad. The measure of what is or is not in this category is undoubtedly subjective, whether it is a failure to problematize, contextualize, or even adequately research a topic, or is simply a facile comparison, or a work giving little evidence of intellectual reflection. It confirms the fears of all of those who think the academic study of religion and popular culture is a waste of time. It may be that those of us who are “second fielders” are made uncomfortable with what others might see as “cutting edge,” that it might push us beyond our own tradition-based, tradition-inculcated comfort levels. It is certainly the case that some of the work in this category serves as valuable primary data, even if it lacks scholarly merit.

But as intellectually vapid as some of the work in this category may be, it can be amusing. It can be fun. It can be a guilty pleasure. And it sells; it sells because we (all) read it—I’ll read almost anything about the religious aspects of “Dead Elvis.” As I noted earlier, members of the “baby boom” generation were, in their young adulthood, great in number, but also better off than their parents and grandparents had been at the same age. This generation was also able to exploit periods of great economic expansion, and unmoored as many of them are in terms of institutional religious attachments, in the words of the Rev. Lillian Daniel (2011), they “find themselves uniquely fascinating.” What more does one need for successful consumerism? Works in the fourth category cater to this community’s self-interest—their readers (like anyone would) find themselves and elements of their nostalgia to be of great interest—I remember when Elvis died, and how devastated my fourth grade teacher was; I visited Graceland, and saw the gravestone bearing the misspelled middle name, proof (to some) that the man still lives. The benefit to others has been a marked increase in interest among publishers for materials exploring the relation between religion and popular culture—particularly that which explores this relationship among those in this segment of the purchasing population—apparently whether or not this material is highly critical, profoundly theological, intensely scholarly, or fun-time leisure reading.¹⁵ Different publishers have staked out areas of their own interest and expertise, and materials produced by religiously affiliated and “trade” publishers can be found in all three of the more academic categories. But the market in general is still populated with work of dubious value, and despite the claims of Rudyard Kipling (1922: 56), not every good cigar is a smoke—sometimes it’s just a stinking mess.

Conclusion: and the whole earth was of one language

Certainly there are other factors involved in the propagation of work beyond the market impulses of the “baby boomer” generation, and the producers’ willingness to address these impulses with reading materials, academic or not. At the very least, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the expansion of industrialization into

non-Western European nations—the post-war rise of nations like Australia and (re-built) Japan, emerging nations (like Israel and South Africa), the so-called “Asian Tigers” (South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and others), and the “BRICs” (Brazil–Russia–India–China)—that has created a new and expanded market not only for the products of American culture (Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Starbucks, etc.), but also for the very processes of making these products (industrialization, capitalism, commercialism), and the concomitant worldview that accompanies them (see Ritzer 1993). The cross-border realignment of cultures has generated a phenomenon Benjamin Barber (1996, 1992) calls “McWorld”—a global yet increasingly homogenous experience where one can purchase KFC in Cairo (as I have), McDonald’s in India, or Starbucks in Japan (see Wade 2009). This globalization, which Roland Robertson (1985: 348) defines as “the process by which the world becomes a single place both with respect to recognition of a very high degree of interdependence between spheres and locales of social activity across the entire globe and to the growth of consciousness pertaining to the globe as such,” is roughly parallel to Wuthnow’s (1998) “seekers” described above: individualists who are no longer committed to specific, inherited, bounded identities, but who, for the sake of being free to define themselves, are likewise willing to accept (at face value) the self-definition of others.

On a global scale, this means that people from any of the industrialized nations could parachute into any of the others and, once language barriers are overcome, live as comfortably (intellectually, socially, and, within reason, economically) as anywhere else. In terms of popular culture, it means that these same “parachuters” can find for purchase music, films, food, clothes, or any of the carriers of personal identity that they might find at home (see Crothers 2006)—wherever that might be. And in terms of religion and popular culture, it means that many more people are engaging popular culture in ways worthy of study, and that many more are willing to read about it!

There is another aspect to globalization. As Wuthnow (1998) illustrates in the American context, there can be no “seeker” without the “dweller,” the communitarian for whom identity is defined by membership in a group whose standards define its boundaries. On the global scale, these are similar to Barber’s “tribalists,” and while in the American context they mostly define political behavior (despite the dire rhetoric of some; see Hunter 1994, 1991), on the global stage the boundary between the two (“globalists” and “tribalists”) has been the location of significant conflict (for an early exploration of the topic, see Marty and Appleby 1991). What for Wuthnow (1988) has been a “restructuring of American religion” for the world has been a restructuring of global contact, and reorganization of conflict.

As these lines get redrawn, the scholar of religion and popular culture will be increasingly confronted not only by questions about the globalization of mass produced culture and its impact on religion, but also by questions of the role of religion and popular culture in the contact and conflict of the ideologically reorganized world of “globalists” and “tribalists.” What might the mass production, appropriation, commercialization, and distribution mean in this context? The answers to those questions might not be too surprising. But how might the changing context of globalization—and the reactions against globalization, and the possible calcification or irritation of the boundaries between “globalist” and “tribalist”—be affected by

changing roles and meanings of religion in, and through, popular culture? Beyond the English-speaking world, these and other questions about the relationship of religion and popular culture will have increasing significance, and as historian of American religion Catherine Albanese (1996: 736) concludes in her introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* dedicated to the growing importance of the field, “[s]tudents of religion need to pay strenuous attention to them.”

Notes

- 1 Unfortunately, Pinsky (2001; 2007) incorrectly cites the editors of the volume rather than the authors of the specific chapter, an error I attempt to correct in a review of Pinsky’s revised edition (Mazur 2009).
- 2 McCarthy and I confess as much in the introduction to the first edition (2001: 7).
- 3 As John Lyden suggests in his chapter on definitions in this volume, depending on how one defines the terms, one could argue that popular culture has always been “a problem” for religion; religions all seem to come with scriptural and historic figures who provide stern warnings that, as the poet William Wordsworth (1889: 203) put it, “the world is too much with us, late and soon.”
- 4 It should be noted, however, that Malcolm X, Paul Tillich, and Martin Buber died that year, and that I was born that year. But so were millions of others—for either stage of life—so you are left to draw your own conclusions.
- 5 Hammond here is building on the notion of the “first” disestablishment (the separation of constitutional law from religion embodied in the “religion” clauses of the First Amendment) and the “second” establishment (the beginning of the end of a mainstream Protestant cultural monopoly in American public society; see Handy 1991).
- 6 A similar pattern is evident for non-canonical gospels (Barnabbas, Hebrews, Judas, Mary, Philip, Thomas) as well as Bible-related gospels (Isaiah, James, Jesus, Moses, Paul, Pilate, etc.) (see Mazur 2013: 158 n11). The numbers are based on a 2011 search of the Library of Congress online catalog, which contains records for materials going back only to 1815.
- 7 Whether in response to the 1965 change in immigration law or not, the number of books purporting to explain the “Tao of ...” or “Zen and the Art of ...” has followed an identical (if slightly off-set) pattern (Mazur 2013: 158 n12).
- 8 In a slight bit of (likely unintentional) religion humor, members of this last cohort are often identified as “Nones,” which would be the plural of their answer to the question “What is your religious preference?” (see Vernon 1968).
- 9 This new model has had such a profound impact on the study of religion that it has been called a “new paradigm,” replacing (or at least challenging) the standard “secularization thesis” which has its roots in nineteenth century European triumphalism (see Warner 1993).
- 10 This is not to suggest that there were no alternative forms of religious expression before this historical point; of course there were. But the degree of diversity of expression—matched with greater social freedom to express that diversity—reached an unprecedented level after the transformations of the 1960s.
- 11 As if to confirm the scholarly value of Short’s work, the introduction to the first Italian edition of *The Gospel According to Peanuts* was written by novelist and semiotics scholar Umberto Eco (Boxer 2000).
- 12 It is hardly coincidental that the *Journal of Religion & Film*, the *Journal of Religion & Theatre* (now defunct), and the *Journal of Religion & Popular Culture* were all founded around the same time, and can be located only online, in digital format.
- 13 As a case in point, all three who wrote the paper on religion and *The Simpsons* chose more “traditional” religious studies topics for our dissertation research: I wrote on religion and

- constitutional litigation; Dalton wrote on religion and nineteenth-century pseudo-science; and Siems wrote on Native Americans and the philosophy of religion.
- 14 One could also argue that there is a fifth category: the study of those materials in popular culture that are entirely secular and empty of religious meaning (see Siegler 2012). There is a tendency among some theologians, scholars, and writers of schlock to see religion everywhere; works in this category—for a variety of reasons—seek to articulate clearer boundaries, or any at all.
- 15 Changes in the economy have also driven publishers to scale back the publication of material of “strictly” scholarly merit in favor of works that will have broader classroom or commercial appeal (see Worstall 2012; Caro 2009: 1–9).

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