

neopragmatists. The grounds for such a critique have already been prepared in the forceful exposure of the emptiness of the radical positions. The problem is not simply, as Kimura proposes, that there is epistemological inconsistency within the neopragmatic camp and that the more unrestrained social activists have devised theological novelties that they hope will be useful for their political agendas. The problem is in not considering that the deepest reason that “what works” about explanations that do really work is that they are true, that they express thoughts that really disclose the causal structures of reality.

Seen in this way, even the restrained neopragmatists like Rescher and Putnam are all the more praiseworthy because they are fundamentally alert to the need for epistemology to privilege the mind’s receptivity to reality in its knowledge, both the reality of the mundane world and the reality of the divine. Putnam is, after all, a practicing Jew and Rescher a practicing Catholic. Their philosophical adoption of some of the categories and practices of pragmatism strikes me as part of a larger philosophical realism that understands that explanations that “work” do so because of the causal structures of reality that these explanations describe.

Just as the metaphysically-friendly pragmatism of Peirce is so different from the metaphysically-hostile pragmatism of Dewey, so too the self-described neopragmatism of Putnam or Rescher is worlds apart from the self-described neopragmatism of West or Gordon. Likewise, their humble admission of religious reverence is not the cosmic pantheism of Emerson nor the utilitarian fictions of social radicals but an admirable wonder over the irreducibly divine for which they need to find a place in their philosophies if those philosophies are really to “work” as explanations for what transcends human control.

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FINDING FAITH: THE SPIRITUAL QUEST OF THE POST-BOOMER GENERATION by Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller (*Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick N.J., 2008*). Pp. xi +228, £60.95 hbk and £18.95 pbk

This is an unusual study of Californian post-boomers (those aged between 20 and 40) seeking communally based forms of spiritual embodiment to express their faith by means of deeply felt experiential styles of worship. Usually religious belief in the sociology of religion is consigned to understandings of holistic forms of spirituality or cults and sects. By contrast, this study focuses on Christianity and the vigorous responses of its followers to a culture of postmodernity. The title and the cover suggest something topical; often in such cases, one is deeply disappointed. This is not so in regard to this study.

Anybody with the slightest interest in what is going in the religious marketplace should read this study carefully. It is very clearly written; the sociology sits lightly but highly significantly; the ethnography is vivid and credibly authentic; and the insights yielded are rich and unexpected. The title indicates why the study is so interesting. It is about finding faith, not losing it. The testimonies of the children of light, who in the mass media are often cast into outer darkness, are given sociological recognition in ways that reverse the usual expectations that postmodernity destroys religious vitality and paralyses its believers, most especially if they are young. Far from being cowed, the post-boomers find in postmodernity distinctive opportunities for forming their own strategies for seeking salvation. Apart from one group in the study, most of the others seem beneficiaries of the opportunities for the expression of belief postmodernity so distinctively generates.

Reflecting the cynical traits of postmodernity, usually, the majority of sociologists, gravely afflicted with secularity, deal in nefarious demolition jobs on religious belief. As deconstruction workers on religion, they do not handle testimonies

of edification, yet these are what the study supplies. Although not cited in the study, Flory and Miller use religion as a form of resistance to postmodernity in ways that echo the insights of Bauman.

The study is concerned with a typology of four forms of response: innovators; appropriators; resisters; and reclaimers. As Flory and Miller note, there are border crossings between the types, with the innovators and reclaimers emerging as the more focused seekers (pp. 163–67). Moral conservatism links the resisters and reclaimers. The forms can best be seen as ideal types, whose properties are exaggerated for comparative purposes.

The innovators are made up of fashion designers and those employed in visual culture, such as in advertising and information technology. They use their gifts to render rituals and symbols in a more credible manner than is to be found in more traditional Christian churches. Many are disillusioned with the forms of Christianity they have inherited. Far from being cultural dopes, as with others in the study, the innovators are highly educated. They know how to read culture and to appropriate and to adapt its images and conventions to realise their Christian needs, which are to enhance their experience of the God they seek. The insights that sustain their vision come from an extensive literature, from networks and other resources that seek to meld postmodernism into Christianity. These emergent churches are by no means marked by introspection; the communal affirmation they realise within their assemblies acts as a stimulus to reach out with acts of charity to their surrounding neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, the innovators encounter change and decay in their forms of seeking. The Bridge communities, one of the prime examples studied, die but its followers achieve a sort of resurrection in a new church with the designation ‘the Symbol People’ (pp. 48–51). Treated as pioneers of inculturation operating in the inhospitable ethos of postmodernity, the innovators are given a sympathetic reading by Flory and Miller.

The second ideal type, the appropriators, is more diffuse. They are astute readers and refractors of the culture of young Californians and build their evangelical messages in ways that dovetail into their ethos. The aim is to package forms of worship in performance and in settings that will realise deeply felt spiritual experiences. With their ‘Christian Stores’, they are ‘God branders’, re-naming the gifts of consumerism with sacred marks (p. 79). With their mega-churches designed for large-scale worship, appropriators generate ‘a form of consumer Christianity’ that requires no sacrifice of life styles. Christ is packaged, marketed and given visual forms in identifiable ways easy to appropriate for use to mark a new identity, one of being a real believer and one who is not afraid to display their new found affiliations on Christian-themed T-shirts and other clothing (p. 82). Technology, charismatic figures and extensive networking, are all employed in these evangelical strategies of affirming consumers in their comfort zones. Fascinating as the material yielded is, this form begs questions about its results. The lack of a theodicy, a weakness of the study as a whole, becomes all too apparent in this sunny-side form of religion whose consumers seem locked in an eternal present.

It is in relation to the last two types, the resisters and the retrievers, that the productive contradictions of the study come into focus. The resisters are given a cold reading. Deemed patronising, they are charged with misreading the times. Their ambitions are to roll back the forces of postmodernity by appeal to the powers of reason. The theology (academic) of these resisters is based on a curious conjunction of evangelical Protestantism and Thomism. Those in the emerging churches who seek to refract and accommodate to the cultural times are designated as ‘naïve and unaware of the dangers associated with postmodern thinking...’ (p. 105). Little reference is made to the expressive outlets of the resisters. What is of ritual relates to the superior attitudes of academic theologians at a conference which sought to ‘improve’ the theologies of emerging churches.

For Flory and Miller, at least the other three types actively respond to a culture of postmodernity, unlike the resisters who seek to dismiss all it signifies. Mere cleverness is not an antidote to the acids generated by postmodernity. More imaginative and unexpected responses are required than appeals to mere reason. It is at this juncture, that the study takes on a property of originality in relation to the fourth type: the reclaimers.

Disputes over the extraordinary rites in Catholicism have led to fears of new liturgical wars re-commencing just at the point when the ordinary rites are taking root, however imperfect and ill-considered they might be. More worrisome is that these Tridentine rites seem to attract young followers for whom Vatican II is the product of another generation. They have no affiliation with what they did not forge and so an odd generation gap has come to pass. Often written off as dilettantes dealing incomprehensibly in lace and incense, they seem perverse to progressives. But, Flory and Miller give these zealots a sociological name and also credible understandings of their unexpected journeys backwards.

Reclaimers are often refugees from the mega-churches, small in number and as an Episcopalian priest indicated, 'seriously seeking deep sanctification' (p. 149). They are converts (and the use of the term here is significant) who want a demanding religion, whose forms will make claims on them. These can be authoritarian, ascetic and unexpectedly structured, but in the constraints freedom is to be found. These converts seek to end the drift that emerges from the overly individualised expressivism of postmodernity. As a reaction against this supposed freedom, the reclaimers want well defined rituals and symbols where commitments can be forged and communal affiliations realised. This response might seem conservative, but in the setting of postmodernity, it is profoundly radical. They seek to reclaim a sense of memory, to link into wider and deeper traditions of Christianity, in this case those of Episcopalian and Orthodox Churches.

Flory and Miller are fortunate in their sample and in the testimonies of these reclaimers who speak eloquently of what they found in the hallowed and structured rituals of these churches. For them, spiritual embodiment was enhanced by gestures, by what the eye could see but also by what was smelt, the incense being very much the case in point. In the formalities of these rituals, they found unexpected liberations into depths they had never realised existed. In the shifting milieu of postmodernity, what is of tradition, that hitherto seemed restrictive and dead, now emerges as innovative and alive with possibilities. Perhaps this is a lesson to be learnt from postmodernity and the questing for faith within it, that its properties of re-contextualisation enable what is old to be recast as new. Thus, as a priest noted, perhaps incongruously, 'Orthodoxy stands as a hierarchical church in the midst of an egalitarian wasteland' (p. 156).

What Flory and Miller bring to the fore so well are the choices distinctively generated for the post-boomers by the emergence of a culture of postmodernity. Their options lie between the solaces of 'do-it-yourself' spirituality and the communal securities of ritual and tradition (p. 156). The study affirms the pursuit of the latter and this is expressed in the term 'expressive communalism' (pp. 185–93). Like Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* (1986) that examined the dilemmas of individualism and commitment, this study captures well a sense of journeying, of being on the road and of feeling that faith is alive even in the unpropitious circumstances of a culture of postmodernity. The study is perhaps an exercise in McGrath's organic theology, which they cite (p. 190), whose concern is with how faith operates on the ground of culture. This study gets close to the religious utterances on that ground and, however, unexpectedly garners a rich harvest of insight. Flory and Miller have not written a religious tract; rather they offer the sociological means for theologians to write one fit for the times.

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