

Book Reviews

Birgit Meyer & Annelies Moors (eds). *Religion, media, and the public sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, vi, 325 pp.

reviewed by Evangelos Karagiannis

The present volume is an excellent collection of essays addressing the multiple and complex relationships between mass media, religion and the public sphere against the background of neoliberal globalization and the growing incapacity of nation-states to control and regulate the market of cultural goods. It originates from a conference held in December 2001 at the University of Amsterdam and covers a wide range of religions and local settings. Next to the introductory essay the book comprises fourteen empirical chapters. Two of them deal with Pentecostalism (chap. 2 and 14) while another one, focussing on a Jewish revivalist movement, concludes with a comparison with Pentecostalism in Brazil (chap. 4). Despite the variation in the disciplinary background of the authors, the book has a strong anthropological bent. This is not only because most contributors to the volume are anthropologists, but primarily because of the particular anthropological way of raising theoretical issues in local contexts which characterizes most of the volume's contributions.

Central to the book is the notion of the public sphere. Although rejecting the universalistic and normative aspects of the Habermasian notion along with its emphasis on rationality, the editors suggest in their introductory essay to make use of it as a starting point for further theorization because it provides the opportunity to address the emergence of arenas of debate and identity formation that are not fully controlled by the state. The main targets of the book are to highlight the role of the nexus between religion and mass media in the transformation of the public sphere and, further, to demonstrate how religion itself gets transformed through its articulation with mass media and forces of commercialization.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first section focussing on changes caused by new forms of religious mediation opens with Hirschkind's chapter, which addresses the impact of recording and circulating cassettes with sermons on the construction of an Islamic counterpublic in

Egypt. In the following chapter, Birman stresses the spectacular visual self-representation of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil, and demonstrates how this Pentecostal church destabilized the prevalent understanding of the Brazilian nation. In chapter 3, which is concerned with a *haredi*-oriented English-language Judaica Publishing House, Stolow examines transformations of religious authority through the commodification of mass produced literature. In the section's concluding chapter, Lehmann and Siebzehner consider how the Sephardic revivalist *t'shuva* movement in Israel, by establishing pirate radio stations and by mobilizing popular culture, is increasingly challenging the dominant secular elite culture of the country.

The second section explores the relationship between publicly mediated religion and the politics of difference. In the section's first chapter (chap. 5), Moors discerns significant differences between academic-verbal and visual representations of debates on family law and the implication of Islam and Gender in Palestine and points to the need to take into account the politics of embodied presence in the analysis of the public sphere. In chapter 6, Schulz illustrates the case of the charismatic Malian Muslim preacher Haidara who, responding to his exclusion from national broadcast media, successfully created an alternative sphere of discursive exchange by circulating his own video- and audio-taped sermons, a fact that enabled him to propagate a vision of community alternative to that of the nation-state. Hackett (chap. 8) demonstrates the growing significance of the media in managing religious diversity by delineating the conflicts and negotiations over airtime for religious groups in post-apartheid South Africa. Two chapters of this section are also concerned with the politics of secrecy. While Spyer (chap. 7) scrutinizes the narrative strategies of journalists in Maluku who prefer to avoid any reference to the origins of violent events in order to avoid conflict escalation, Ginsburg (chap. 9) inquires into the visual representations of Aboriginal religious life, paying particular attention to the tension between the benefits of revelation of ritual knowledge and cultural imperatives of keeping it secret.

The third section examines the largely unexplored relationship between religion and entertainment. Armbrust (chap. 10) concentrates on an episode of an Egyptian television show during Ramadan and analyzes how state television manages to associate morality and excessive materialism. Focussing on an expert of Islam who rose to a superstar of the Turkish television, Öncü (chap. 11) documents that liberalization of national mediascapes and commodity logic of the media may also reaffirm key motifs of national ideology. In the next chapter, Dasgupta sheds light on the marriage and mutual support of Hindu nationalism and consumerism in visual entertainment

culture. In chapter 13, Dwyer demonstrates how, notwithstanding both the popularity of Hindutva ideology and the traditional manifestation of state ideology in films in India, (global) market forces restrict the incorporation of clear Hindutva imagery in Hindi films. Meyer concludes the volume with a chapter, which on the one hand illustrates the Pentecostal “conquest” of the public sphere in Ghana, and, on the other, by focussing on video films, offers a highly nuanced analysis of how Christianity by going public adopts entertainment features and, thereby, transforms itself.

The volume is notably coherent and a pleasure to read. Its key strength lies in the quality of the chapters that relate stirring empirical material to a host of stimulating theoretical issues. It will undoubtedly prove very inspiring not only for further research in the fields of media and religion but also for current debates on the crisis of the nation-state and the revision of the modernity paradigm.

Jane E. Soothill. *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana*.
Leiden: Brill, 2007, x, 261 pp.

reviewed by Kristina Helgesson Kjellin

Do neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana provide a sense of “community”, of “solidarity” and of “sisterhood” for women, or do they rather work as forums where gender hierarchies and power positioning are being manifested? This is one of the central questions that Jane E. Soothill raises in “Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power. Charismatic Christianity in Ghana” (2007). In the book, based on nine months of fieldwork carried out in three churches, Action Chapel International, Alive Chapel International, and Solid Rock Chapel International, all situated in Accra, she challenges some of the more or less taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the role and nature of Pentecostalism that scholars such as David Martin and Salvatore Cucchiari have established regarding the Pentecostal congregation as a space for women and other groups in society that do not hold power positions, where a sense of community and solidarity is fostered, and where there is more room for grassroots participation than in mainline denominations.

During her periods of fieldwork Soothill participated in the activities of these three congregations. She also spent time with members of the churches, in and out of their homes, and recorded a total of eighteen in-depth interviews, both with pastors and with lay members. I appreciate her discussion of power relations inherent in the fieldwork situation and in the production of knowledge, and her honest account of how she struggled with some of the roles and identities that her informants assigned to her.

The book is divided into two parts, where the first part establishes the background to the second part, in which she analyses the gender discourses and practices that she found in the three congregations. In the initial chapter, Soothill brings up some of the key intellectual debates that she finds relevant for her research, including the study of religion in Africa, gender studies and the critique from African feminists directed towards Western feminist scholars. After a thorough account in the second chapter of the research field of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, she gives a comprehensive description of gender politics and gender relations in Ghana, where both pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial conditions are dealt with. This description is very useful for an understanding of gender relations and gender ideals in the churches under study.

Thereafter she goes into the more analytical part of the book, where in chapter four she presents discourses on womanhood in the three congregations, and discusses whether these discourses reflect or challenge the gender politics and gender ideology of the Ghanaian state. She accounts for how the discourse of the “spiritual equality of believers” merges with a discourse of innate male and female differences, where the submission of women is presented as a way for women to achieve individual success. One way that the discourse of womanhood resembles that of the gender ideology of the state, is the emphasis on motherhood, whereas the stress on individualism and personal success challenges certain social roles for women in society and voices criticism towards “customary law”. Then the focus turns to the level of practice, and to questions of power, participation and democracy, where she shows how female leadership, and the power structures within the women’s sections, does not in particular foster a sense of community and solidarity among the women. On the contrary, Soothill shows how mistrust among the women, lack of networks of mutual obligation, as well as lack of grassroots participation and leadership opportunities for women are rather the norm in these congregations. Moreover, the pastor’s wife in many instances resembles the ‘First Lady’ of politicians, who hold very strong leadership positions, with a status based on patronage, thus not corresponding very well with the discourse of the “spiritual equality of believers”.

The teachings of men, marriage and family life are also dealt with, and she discusses how “born-again” masculinity is being presented as less “African” and more “modern” than “traditional” ideals of masculinity. The responsibility for men’s bad behavior towards women is put on the women, and women are urged to pray harder for their husbands, so that they will change.

In the concluding chapter Soothill enters the discussion of religious and cultural “authenticity”, where neo-Pentecostal and charismatic churches are seen by some Ghanaian feminist scholars as “non-authentic” and “non-African”. Soothill criticizes this perspective on these types of churches and instead argues for an understanding of charismatic Christianity as “firmly rooted in Africa’s religious imagination”.

Soothill manages to keep a good balance between theory and ethnographic material. And once again we are reminded of the complexity of Pentecostalism, and the necessity of speaking of *Pentecostals* in the plural, as suggested by Hollenweger.

Michael Welker (Ed.), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, xvii, 236 pp.
reviewed by Gregor Etzelmüller

The Work of the Spirit documents the results of a conference held in November 2004 in which theologians from traditional Reformation churches and the Pentecostal movement engaged in dialogue with the natural sciences and philosophy in order to investigate various approaches to the reality of the Holy Spirit.

In the very first article by James D.G. Dunn, *Towards the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology* (3-26), the author draws on observations from the New Testament to argue that academic pneumatology and the Pentecostal movement ought to learn from one another. First of all, he argues that the astonishing growth of the Pentecostal movement in the 20th century reminds us of the oft-ignored fact that “Christianity began as an enthusiastic sect!” (23). Not only is the portrayal of Christianity’s origins in Luke “enthusiastic in character” (cf. Acts 2:10f.), but the Pauline congregations experienced God’s grace in an ecstatic way (cf. Gal 2:7-9; 3:2-5; I Cor 1:5,7). At the same time, early Christian enthusiasts ran the risk of neglecting the discernment of the spirits (cf. 24). The unity of enthusiasm and the discernment of the spirits in Christianity’s canonical origins poses a challenge for Christianity today.

Yet we would clearly present a distorted image of the Pentecostal movement today if we applied Dunn’s New Testament observations directly to the current situation and claimed that the Pentecostal movement is an enthusiastic movement in need of help from the classical Reformation churches to “discern the spirits.” First of all, an independent, reflective, academic theology has been developing within the Pentecostal movement, as evidenced by the many solid contributions to this volume by Veli-Martti Kärkkäinen, Frank D. Machia and Amos Yong. Furthermore, painting the Pentecostal movement as an enthusiastic sect would not do justice to the current situation of the Pentecostal movement in North America. In *The Future of American Pentecostal Identity: The Assemblies of God at a Crossroad* (147-165), for example, Margaret Poloma expresses concern that “revivals have been marginalized by many white American Pentecostals as they seek acceptance from the Post-Enlightenment Evangelical [...] communities” (151). With the help of empirical studies, Poloma shows that the majority of pastors in the *Assemblies of God* reject revivals so as not to jeopardize their congregations’ acceptance within the evangelical community in North America

(cf. 160f.). The self-image of white American Pentecostalism as “Evangelicalism plus tongues” weakens the Pentecostal identity of many congregations. For this reason the future of the American Pentecostal movement “may not rest with Anglos but rather with Asians, Africans, and Central and South Americans who are drawn to the pre-modern worldview that frames Pentecostal experiences”(165).

This last quote seems to imply that the Pentecostal movement must choose between modernity and Pentecostal identity. A realistic pneumatology is certainly able to refute this, however. In his article, *The Hidden Spirit and the Cosmos* (169-182), John Polkinghorne warns against concentrating solely on extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit’s activity: “Despite the dramatic outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost [...], there is a strong Christian tradition that attributes also a hidden quality to the working of the Paraclete” (170; cf. also the article by Kathryn Tanner). As a scientist, Polkinghorne is able to recognize the hidden presence of the Spirit in the ongoing work of scientists (cf. the article by Donald G. and Anna York). This view corresponds to the experience of scientists who would never associate the Spirit only with extraordinary breakthroughs in a given scientific field but also with the ongoing search for truth without which scientific progress itself would not exist.

If we apply Polkinghorne’s understanding to the question about the future of Pentecostal identity raised by Poloma, we can deduce three important insights:

1) The Pentecostal movement certainly does not need to choose between modernity or maintaining its own identity. In fact, the distinctive use of reason by the natural sciences in modern times is able to make sense of extraordinary gifts of the Spirit: “It is a well-documented experience in science that after intense but fruitless engagement with a profound problem, a period of mental rest in which the task is set aside for a while can then be followed by the sudden emergence into consciousness of the sought-for solution, fully formed and articulated” (172).

2) The extraordinary activity of the Spirit cannot be separated from its ongoing activity. For this reason concentrating solely on “signs and wonders” would be disastrous for the future of the Pentecostal movement.

3) Like the natural sciences, theology is a method of truth-seeking. If, however, you are certain you have already found the truth and only need to “manage” it, academic approaches may develop that do *not* encourage the pursuit of truth. For this reason future of the Pentecostal movement

depends on choosing its theological dialogue partners carefully as it develops its own theology. If Pentecostals are willing and able to recognize the hidden activity of the Spirit even in the natural sciences, then the most appealing conversation partners will be those theologies which are interested in dialogue with other academic fields and have shown themselves to be willing and able to learn from others.

The final article by Michael Welker, *The Spirit in Philosophical, Theological, and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (221-232), further develops this perspective. With interdisciplinary discourse in mind, Welker points out how various communities may claim to be seeking truth but fail to recognize it under the power of sin, even though they may work together with others: “We know devastating forms of consensus that breed dangerous ideologies or stale theories that block insight over ages. Thus the discernment of the spirits is a most important task in all [...] fields of experience, knowledge, and conviction” (231).

Particularly in pneumatology the discernment of the spirits is required. A concept of the Spirit has taken root in the Western philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Hegel which has also fascinated and influenced theologians but this view falls short of the Spirit of truth as reflected in biblical tradition. For Aristotle and Hegel the Spirit is self-referential and self-aware; even in situations where the Spirit transcends itself, it still remains within itself and dominates everything (cf. 221-224). The Spirit of truth, on the other hand, “will not speak from himself” (John 16:13), will remind the disciples of everything that Christ has said to them (John 14:26) and will not glorify himself but Christ (John 16:14): “The Spirit of the New Testament traditions is not a self-referential personality but an utterly empathetic personality with a multi-contextual presence”(225). The Holy Spirit refers again and again to Jesus Christ –the Spirit’s personal identity exists in this relationship– but this is done in a way appropriate and sensitive to the particular context, as the Spirit carries forward Jesus’ battle against the power of sin.