

The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture

John C. Lyden and Eric Michael Mazur, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*. Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, 2015. 584 pp. \$240.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780415638661.

Religion and popular culture is a relatively new but robust and growing discipline. *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture* provides a panoramic view of this field and gives the reader an appreciation for both the depth of the subject matter and the diversity of its interpretive approaches. This volume complements other edited works such as *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, edited by Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (revised edition; Berkeley: UC Press, 2005); *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, edited by Gordon Lynch (London and New York: Tauris, 2007); and *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*, edited by Kelton Cobb (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), as well as *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* (2002-). With its twenty-eight articles reaching a total of nearly 600 pages of dense print, *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture* was a significant editorial undertaking. The volume was edited by John C. Lyden and Eric Michael Mazur, both veterans in the field of religion and popular culture. The contributors to the volume are primarily associated with Western institutions (e.g., those in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia), and the subject matter tends to favor Western cultural institutions. The editors acknowledge that this is due to the West's influence on global culture, and, when possible, the essays do contain non-Western subject matter (3).

The editors organized the book into three sections. The first part is titled "Approaching the discipline of religion and popular culture" and consists of two methodological essays. In the first essay, Lyden grapples with the difficulties of the terminology of "religion," "culture," "popular culture," and even the word "and." The term "religion," for instance, has been problematic for scholars of religion given its ideological associations and the problems inherent in ascribing a useful definition to it. Nevertheless, Lyden argues that having slippery labels with diverse definitions is not reason enough to eschew the study of these topics, but rather contributors can engage the subject matter with their own imagination and understanding. The second methodological essay, written by Mazur, asks who is writing about religion, and why. It provides a helpful contextualization of the discipline within the study of religion.

The second part of the book is titled "Encounters with popular culture." This part is divided into three sections: (A) Mediated encounters, (B) Material encounters, and (C) Locative encounters. Thus, the first section contains essays on what are traditionally considered media: television, journalism, film, radio, music, video and Internet games, Internet and social networking, and advertising. The second section deals more with material culture: popular literature, comics/graphic novels, food and cooking, fashion, games and dolls, and kitsch. Lastly, the third section of Part 2 explores the relationship between religion and culture in a defined space and time: shopping and consumption, electronic dance music events, sport, and monuments of civil religion.

The third and final part of the book is titled "Religious traditions." The traditions included in this section are Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, contemporary paganism, and Protestantism. This part turns the focus from the cultural component as the unifying element of the essays and instead investigates the subject matter from the basis of a specific religion or denomination. Thus, one can trace perceptions of religions or religious themes across multiple genera or media, and the contributors approach their topics in diverse ways indicative of the diversity of the traditions explored. Essays tend to focus on more specific topics within the respective tradition. For example, William Lafi Youmans's essay on Islam explores the topic of the harmful dichotomous representations of Islam (Islamophobia and Islamophilia, or "bad" versus "good" Muslims) in the West, relying heavily on political journalism, recent television programs (e.g., *Homeland*, *The Killing*, and *Community*), memes and Internet politics, and self-representation (e.g., *Little Mosque on the Prairie*).

In addition to the twenty-eight essays in the volume, the editors have also included short introductory essays, one for the volume and one preceding each of the three parts and each of the three sections of Part 2. These essays briefly contextualize the subject matter of the part or section and also introduce and summarize the essays included in the part or section.

In *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*, the reader will find a helpful survey of the field. The volume is by no means exhaustive, nor could it be, but its essays demonstrate various ways that religion interacts with popular culture and provide examples of how to describe these phenomena. Though the volume is not a reference work in the traditional sense, each chapter can serve as a model for interpretation in a discipline that has plenty of land ripe for harvest. There are a number of photographs throughout the volume, but given the visual nature of the subject matter, more would have been welcome (for example, the description of the Captain America Buddha described on p. 401). Nevertheless, the book would be appropriate for use in an advanced undergraduate course or graduate course on the subject. It would also be beneficial for theological librarians hoping to get a better grasp of the breadth and depth of this maturing discipline.

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