

In conclusion, we can say that the book is a very significant example of problematizing of «post-secular» and will be of interest to anyone interested in contemporary social studies.

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Reviewed work: **Handbook of Hyper-real Religions**. Ed. by *Adam Possamai*. Brill, 2012. xiv, 442 pp.

Sometimes a title of a book can be puzzling. This is true, for example, for a *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, recently published by Brill. What did authors mean? What is this book really about? What are these hyper-real religions?

This volume is part of a series called *Handbooks on Contemporary Religion*. Perhaps, this is our first hint? In any case, the subject should be something current and up-to-date. A second, hint might come from the fact that the authors of the volume are unfamiliar to Russian readers, with the exception of Eileen Barker. She has written a books and articles which have been translated into Russian<sup>1</sup>. Likewise, Massimo Introvigne might be well known, not so much for his academic writings, as for his widely cited in ideas on the Russian Internet. As an expert on inter-religious dialogue and the position of Christianity in modern society,<sup>2</sup> Introvigne is better now in Russia. Both these scholars are in the field of sociology of religion so, we may safely suppose, that whatever this hyper-real religion is, it will be studied with the standard empirical methods of social research. Other authors are young scholars, PhD candidates or those who've just got a degree from different universities worldwide. The editor of the volume is Adam Possamai, a sociologist of Belgian origin, lives in Australia and represents the University of Western Sydney. While European and American studies of religions are well-known here in Russia, we can only imagine what's going on in this field in Australia.

It was Adam Possamai who suggested the conceptual framework uniting this volume in one piece. The initial research on hyper-real religion was started by him some time ago<sup>3</sup>. This term is borrowed from French postmodernist philosophy. For that reason, the first chapter is called «Religion, popular culture and Baudrillard».

Here is the definition Possamai suggests in an introductory chapter of the book: «A hyper-real religion is a simulacrum of a religion created out of, or in symbiosis with, commodified popular culture which provides inspiration at a metaphorical level and/or is a source of beliefs for everyday life» (p. 20). A simulacrum in this context is interpreted as a copy, which is regarded as more real

<sup>1</sup> Баркер А. Новые религиозные движения. Практ.введ.: Пер.с англ. СПб. : Изд-во РХГИ, 1997; Баркер Э. Научное изучение религии? *Вы, должно быть, шутите* / Пер. с англ. // Религиоведение. 2003. № 4. — С. 93-113.

<sup>2</sup>Unexpectedly, Massimo Introvigne was widely interviewed: by Rossiyskaya Gazeta on the future of Christianity (<http://www.rg.ru/2012/07/19/europe.html>) or by Interfax Information Services Group on the Pussy Riot case (<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=46932>).

<sup>3</sup>Possamai A. Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-Real Testament. Peter Lang, 2007.

than the 'real' object, thereby becoming hyper-real. Such simulacra can be found among numerous movements, inspired by various cultural phenomena (from H.P. Lovecraft's books to TV series) and obviously have substantive and formal resemblance of religion. In the Introduction Eileen Barker calls it «new ways of 'being religious'» (p. x).

The structure of this volume is based on three «ideal-types» of social actors, involved in creation and existence of hyper-real religions, sorted out by Adam Possamai. **The first type:** active consumers of popular culture leading to the practice of hyper-real religions (the examples of this type are Jediism, «matrixism» and other religion-like phenomena, brought to life by popular culture). The first and second parts of the volume are devoted to this type. **The second type:** casual consumers of popular culture leading to a sharing of characteristics with hyper-real religions. Traditional religions are also influenced by popular culture, giving birth to such weird forms as «Christian Gamers Guild», or TV series on Hindu myths' subject, or Christian black-metal bands. Such phenomena are examined in the third part of the volume. **The third type:** religious, as well as secular opponents to the consumption of popular culture leading to the practice of hyper-real religions. The examples of such a position are public organizations, opposing Jediism, voicing fears about Harry Potter series and their influence on children, or boycotting Dan Brown's books etc. These groups are regarded in the fourth part.

All these phenomena are described in historic perspective involving wide range of materials, such as mass media, interviews, and surveys. Based on these data, authors draw conclusions on critical tendencies in popular religion and mass culture development in different geographic milieus. Not only Western civilization, but Islamic and Indian contexts, are treated, as well.

All these phenomena are certainly amusing and extravagant. But, are they worthy of academic investigation? The authors of this volume see the answer as positive for two reasons.

First, «evidence suggests that fear, anger and concern about these practices exist, often among the religious establishment. Furthering our empirical knowledge of these practices, as this book has aimed to do, could alleviate some of these fears and provide knowledge upon which to base future discussion and research» (p. 426). That is, such investigations could help our society to understand these hyper-real religions. Second, this research does well for the study of religion itself. As Eileen Barker puts it, such borderline phenomena provide great material for the scholars of religion and sociologists of religion in particular "sharpening their tools" (p. xi).

Perhaps, our Russian colleagues are concerned about demonstrating wide acquaintance with mass culture, as long as this knowledge is regarded as unserious and disreputable in academia. As for Western scholars, encyclopedic knowledge means not only specific scientific scholarship, but practical skill of using your knowledge when dealing with such shallow and casual thing as popular culture. It really excites envy in a reader, to see way how easily authors go from discussing fantasy literature to conspiracy plots in movies, or to Weber's disenchantment theory and German Romantic ideology. This part of the volume was written by Johan Roeland, Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman).

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