

William Closson James. *God's Plenty: Religious Diversity in Kingston.*

Brian Osborne

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rather than the “self’s story” (p. 185). Neuman’s notes and references are extensive and provide valuable leads for anyone wishing to delve into

the primary sources or the current scholarship on early American literature and religion.

BRIAN OSBORNE

Review of

James, William Closson. 2011. *God’s Plenty: Religious Diversity in Kingston*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Pp. 472, black and white photographs, paperback, ISBN 9780773539259, \$34.95.

William Closson James’s foray into the diversity of religions in his home community, Kingston, Ontario, prompted someone to remark, “Religious diversity in Kingston? Is there any” (p. 213)? Certainly, it’s a fair question. The 2001 census data for visible minorities reported Kingston had less than 5 per cent, Ontario 20 per cent, and Toronto 37 per cent; and only 12 per cent of Kingston’s population were foreign-born, as opposed to Toronto’s 40 per cent. Accordingly, Kingston’s skyline is punctuated by the material cityscape of spires and steeples, towers and domes of the “PLURA”—Presbyterians, Lutheran, United, Roman Catholics, Anglicans—that formerly dominated the intangibilities of the theological and political culture of the city. Indeed, in approaching the religious “character” of this “mid-sized” place through the imagination of several of Kingston’s fiction writers, James seeks to “plumb the depths of spiritual mysteries and the nature of belief amidst the prosaic features of an ordinary Kingston setting” (5). For me, the best is Robertson Davies’s skewer of the community: it’s “the place where Anglican clergymen go when they die!”

But, for students of both material and intangible heritage, these architectural and psychological religious determinants have been eroded physically and symbolically in recent decades. Visually, the spires, towers and domes of Kingston still dominate the city’s skylines and streetscapes, but their significance has changed. Yet, as *God’s Plenty* points out, while challenged by the growing secularization of society and the immigration of new and non-Christian faiths into 21st-century Canada,¹ religion and spirituality still manifest themselves in new ways in modern times. Professor James should know. His four decades of residence and participation in

Kingston’s religious life have here been enhanced by more than one hundred interviews with representatives of Kingston’s religious groups, and enriched by his scholarly investigation of contemporary trends.

But, again, why Kingston? Certainly, it is unique and not representative of the current Canadian polity. With a metropolitan population of a mere 150,000 and a putative Anglo-Celtic culture, it would appear to not have experienced the religious diversity associated with the growing multiculturalism and trans-nationalism introduced by immigration to larger centres. That said, *God’s Plenty* sets the path for studies of religious trends in other mid-sized cities in Canada in three ways: its record and analysis of the praxis of established religions in Kingston; its record and analysis of less mainstream religions; and its examination of the degree to which religion has left the public sphere and become more a matter of private, personal concern. Availing himself of foundational works on Kingston’s religion by other scholars, and spicing his research with personal vignettes and lively anecdote, James employs an essentially ethnographic and phenomenological exploration of what it means to be an adherent of particular religions. In doing so, he contextualizes the shift away from discussion of theological issues in the growing secularism and the overall trend toward individual, private belief systems.

While the burning issues for Anglicans and Presbyterians have been same-sex marriages, civil unions, ordination of gays, and dwindling and aging congregations, others of PLURA lean to more liberal doctrinal matters and such as modern secular humanistic concerns with inclusivity, social justice and democratic procedures. As a group, they are all struggling to reconcile tradi-

tional concerns for morality and the transcendent with concerns for social justice and relevancy. But Kingston is also experiencing change in a score or more evangelical churches. Their traditional diagnostic brand of emotionalism, expository sermons, charismatic leaders, and gifts of the spirit are being challenged by a “postmodern differentiation” and “detraditionalization” that erodes the “overarching narratives of denominationalisms” (p. 116). What James calls “splintering micronarratives” serve to celebrate individualism and a freedom from formerly dominant and well-established ecclesiastical bureaucracies. They allow people to turn to churches that correspond to their cultural views and accommodate their personal preference for music, language, message and community (p. 117).

Then, what about such “proselytizing groups” as the Salvation Army, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Brethren? Once they were seen to be radical and even heretical, and their unorthodox theologies were attacked, ridiculed and isolated from the dominant host culture. But some, especially the Salvation Army, have evolved into just another evangelical church with a mortgage in the suburbs and a transition to a social agency meeting various human needs. This spatial and functional shift was also the intent of the several “ethnic churches” serving Protestant, Eastern and Roman Catholic ethnicities. They are central to understanding contemporary Kingston’s cultural diversity, as they are expressions of former cultures and also devices for adjusting to the New World. Rather than ghettoizing their distinctive communities, ethnic Christianities are offering new possibilities for older established churches.

James also turns his analytical eye on such “liberal” religions as Quakers, Reform Jews and Unitarians that prompted some mainline Christian churches to address social activism, freedom of conscience and freedom from doctrinal creeds. Consider the principles of the Unitarian Universalists: the worth and dignity of all; justice and compassion for all; the nurturing of spiritual growth; the free search for truth and meaning; conscience and the democratic process; world peace, liberty and justice; respect for the web of existence. The emphasis is on humans, not God. And, as they have minimal liturgical needs, they have a limited demand for space and

their locational flexibility, which results in their visible presence throughout the community and therefore increased opportunities for social outreach and overall Christian stewardship. Other churches faced with declining memberships, demographics and secularization are “building rich but attendance poor.” An indicator of their liberalism is their position on same-sex marriage in the context of social justice and human rights, and the future of these liberal religions lies with those uncomfortable with religious creeds and dogma but who wish to continue association with a faith community. For many, rejecting the supernatural and miraculous, their “seekership” (p. 211), or cobbling together one’s own religion, is a postmodern way of being religious.

Predictably, given the current discussions regarding women in faith, special attention is given to their changing role and growing impact. James makes the point that, ironically, while they dominated congregations in attendance and supportive roles, traditionally, they were excluded by a male-dominated hierarchy in conservative Christianity. As a counterpoint, the exception of the Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul and their long-standing mission to the poor and destitute is highlighted. Also, to emphasize the challenge to past exclusions, five stories document the adaptability and creativity of other women in religion as they charted their own routes into alternative ways of being religious. The study closes with reference to the part played by religion in Kingston’s institutions and top employers. Provocatively, James’s concluding reflections assert that the lineaments of a public Christian culture are still apparent: religious holy days, the support of religious schools, the national anthem and public prayers. Notwithstanding the growing presence of secularism, and despite the cynics, James demonstrates how Kingston *is* home to followers of Islam, Baha’i, Hinduism, Sai Baba and Sikhism, many of whom emphasize their Canadianness and contribute to “ecumenicity and inter-religious practice” in Kingston.

Despite the putative peculiarities of Kingston, perhaps the religious character of this distinctive place is typical of so many Canadian cities of its size in the 21st century. Persistent debates about core doctrines and contemporary ways of being Christian are raising issues of personal spirituality everywhere, especially in a city where “the hues

of cosmopolitanism enrich the monochromatic greys of a limestone city” (372). As such, *God’s Plenty* has much to offer those interested in Canada’s changing cultural landscape, as well as students of this distinctive place, Kingston.

Note

1. For more, see Taylor (2007) and Scott (2012).

NIKO SILVESTER

Review of

Knight, Jeffrey Todd. 2013. *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Pp. 288, 33 illustrations, cloth, ISBN 9780812245073, \$59.95.

Since the Internet has become widespread, people have been lamenting that hypertext will be the end of literature, or predicting that it will save it. When ebooks seemed to take the world by storm, the same lamenting and exulting went on. One argument for and against ebooks is that electronic texts are not static. The printing press, the folklore goes, made texts immutable, and enabled the concept of a definitive edition to become reality. If the dominant format of text becomes electronic, every version could potentially be different from every other version. For some people, this might as well be the end of the world. For others, it’s the glorious future.

How refreshing, then, to discover that the idea of a fixed, definitive text is actually a rather new thing. The printing press did not, in fact, mean that every copy of a book was identical. Certainly you could argue that books started out as identical when they came off the press. But the way books were purchased, bound, consumed and even written meant that the text was not as unchangeable as we’d like to believe.

In *Bound to Read*, Jeffrey Todd Knight re-examines some of the early works of the Renaissance, or what is known to printers and bookbinders as “the early handpress era.” It was the age of incunabula, the first printed books, and though it made reproduction much quicker and easier than manuscript copying, it didn’t at first change how their composers or readers interacted with books.

Knight shows how much of our conception of books as stand-alone objects, as fixed and solitary texts, comes from the late-19th- and

References

Scott, Jamie, ed. 2012. *The Religions of Canadians*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

early 20th-century ideals of conservation and cataloguing. In order to make books easier to find and use in a library, each individual work was contained in its own separate binding, and given its own call or catalogue number. At this time, many libraries—especially the better-funded ones equipped with their own in-house binderies—began massive re-binding efforts in order to separate books that had been bound together. It not only made the books easier to find but also reduced wear on books because scholars no longer had to handle and flip through pages they didn’t need to get to the ones they did.

Unfortunately, re-binding books in their own covers obscured a lot of really interesting information. In the early days of the printing press, the printed page might have become significantly less expensive to produce and purchase, but bookbinding costs didn’t change very much. It still required a skilled craftsperson to sew and cover a book (at least until publishers discovered all the ways they could cut corners and automate the process). Thus, books were often sold “in sheets” (that is, without covers) to be bound by whichever binder customers favoured, in whatever binding materials they could afford.

More importantly, because binding was expensive, and many early books were short (compared to modern “doorstopper novels,” for example), buyers would often group several books together for binding if they were the same size. Knight reconstructs some examples of these groupings by use of old library records and considers some rare examples of collected books that escaped re-binding. What he discovered is