moting his own agenda, it may be commented in passing that the idea of "attaining Buddhahood [i.e. enlightenment] in this very life" (*sokushin jōbutsu*) in fact has a substantial pedigree in Japanese Buddhism. Note also that while Harrison, in his introduction, seems to be reluctantly withdrawing from the "forest hypothesis" he also holds out the prospect of a further critical examination of the arguments adduced.

There is rather more sympathy for the significance of the presumed "forest monks" in Daniel Boucher's "Recruitment and Retention in early Buddhist Sodalities" in which the idea of a single hypothesis of origin for the Mahāyāna is again rejected. Boucher draws analogies from the various strains and tensions exhibited by the pioneers of modern-day new religious movements to seek hints as to why new texts were pushed forward by a variety of new groups that, taken together, came to be regarded as the Mahāyāna. Fascinating though such speculation is, it unfortunately remains in the realm of speculation due to our inability to access any substantial evidence from a social field. The argument is best taken as a healthy reminder that new texts, with shifts of vocabulary and thought, were indeed produced by real persons, even if their identity, not least thanks to the very nature of the "thus I have heard" sutra genre, is lost from view. In this respect the innovators were in any case very different from any modern counterparts in new religious movements, who usually cherish a personality cult.

Similar hints from phenomena nearer to our own times are offered by Douglas Osto in "Altered States and the Origins of the Mahayana". The point is argued in persuasive detail and indeed it was surely the case that at least some Mahāyāna texts corresponded to "visions" or "trance-like states" which could be reiterated precisely with the help of the texts in question, and in at least some of which a marvellous *samādhi* is imaginatively set forth, opening up a vision of new worlds, or in new-speak, multiverses. His exploration is reminiscent of, but apparently not dependent on discussions of this subject current in the late nineteen-sixties. Full marks to Osto for mentioning the Lotus Sutra in this regard. He might have gone on to discuss the very genre of "visualisation" sutras, but of course these were later, and Sanskrit originals are mainly unknown. Both Boucher and Osto, in their own ways, are addressing what I used to call "the psychology of sutra production" and this is surely an aspect worthy to be carefully reflected upon, and indeed suggestively treated in these papers. But clues to the processes may be found above all in the texts themselves. I would here merely suggest that the psychology of Buddhist sutra production (focused on the phrase "thus I have heard") is rather different from that of the production of "holy scriptures" or "bibles" as in the American Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) or in some of the new religions of Japan such as Tenshō Kōtai Jingū Kyō.

In Sasaki Shizuka's contribution, "The Concept of 'Remodelling the World'" similar considerations are hovering in the background, without becoming explicit. He focuses on the appearance of the fascinating Buddha known as Akṣobhya, whose deeds, vows and visions are set forth in a sutra regarded as being very early, even pre-dating the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Be that as it may, it is of primary significance as an early example of the way in which the early Mahāyāna imagination worked. Subliminally, the parallel with the sutras concerning Amitābha will not fail to make itself felt. The paradoxical effect of the *Ārya-Akṣobhya tathāgatasya vyūha* coming into prominence, particularly through the work of Satō Naomi, is on the one hand to relativise the high visibility of the Amida texts of Pure Land Buddhism, and on the other hand to increase the venerable appearance of such texts in general in the early development of the Mahāyāna. That makes it easier for Amida Buddhists to argue that their key writings are typical of original Mahāyāna (even if not demonstrably the very earliest) and thereby even true to original Buddhism (as Mahāyāna is presumed by Pure Land followers to be). It should be noted that Sasaki is not actually arguing this; but what can be drawn from his presentation is that the imaginative invention of further "worlds" as in the case of Akṣobhya Tathāgata was a persistent element in the original Mahāyāna mix. A consideration of emptiness alone is not enough.

Nevertheless, the notion of emptiness is persistent, and we have already seen that Johannes Bronkhorst seeks to work out its

provenance. It would have been helpful if his contribution had been directly followed by that of Ingo Strauch on "Early Mahāyāna in Gandhāra: New Evidence from the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra" a text which the author had previously studied in detail (see his bibliography). Strauch checks this text with respect to a number of leading ideas commonly reckoned to characterize the Mahāyāna, some of which are in evidence here, while others are not. Of particular importance in the text are the notion, and the articulation, of the bodhisattva path. In this path is emphasised a meditational feature described as "non-apperception" but while the notion of emptiness is apparently hovering in the background it is rarely mentioned as a term. The plurality of buddha-fields is regarded as "a foundational idea", and one of these is none other than Abhirati, the world of Akṣobhya mentioned above. Amitābha and his "pure land" however are notably absent. Above all it is remarkable that there are no references to *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of insight (or wisdom). This absence does not necessarily imply a marked difference of thought, for Strauch sums up the approach of his text as a kind of "rhetoric of negation", typical of what might be termed the emptiness tradition.

Finally, we turn to the presentation by Rhi Juhyung entitled "Looking for Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas: A Reflection on Visual Evidence in Early Indian Buddhism" which is accompanied by figures of Buddhist statuary, some waring turbans. While the paper is learned, informative and interesting, it does not really add any crucial clues to the so-called "riddle" of Mahāyāna origins. Not that this is any fault of the author. Rather, if we follow carefully the variations introduced, the statuary seems to have lagged behind the texts and the meditations and visions which inspired it. In this perspective it is appropriate that Rhi's account appears at the end, together with some welcome illustrations of bodhisattva figures from Gandhāra. Though evidently hard to identify, these do show at least that Mahāyāna devotion was turning towards such figures as well as to the Buddha himself, thus intimating ever greater complexity.

Reflecting partly divergent views presented at a conference, this book does not quite get to have a common program. Though parts may be read with much profit, there is evidently still no clear consensus about when, where and how the Great Vehicle came to be set in motion. There is also no clear consensus about methodology. Of course, Indologists will always salute philological work, and that is fine as far as it goes, though some readers may find the number and complexity of footnotes rather tedious (sometimes with lengthy and potentially anachronistic quotations from Tibetan). Insofar as Mahāyāna is regarded as having been somehow "new" then analogies from more recent examples of innovation in religion are not inappropriate. But the problem is an old one, and in some ways a general one. After all, when, where, and how did Gnosticism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, Tantra or neo-Shamanism get going? How do streams of tradition and clumps or clusters of innovation need to be analysed, defined and assessed? If the search for a single "essence" is chimeric, how many characteristics make up an apple, or a pear, or an onion, and which ones?

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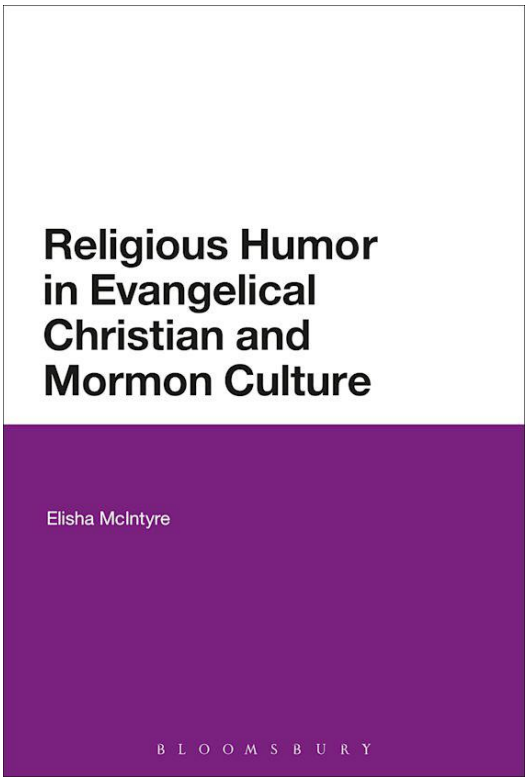
MCINTYRE, E. (2018) *RELIGIOUS HUMOR IN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN AND MORMON CULTURE*. BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC. 221 PP. HBK £108. ISBN: 978-1-3500-0548-8.

This entertaining book is delightful to read and yet academically excellent. Elisha McIntyre opens with a joke – "Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible? Samson. He brought the house down" (p. 3) – and builds a fascinating argument about the way humour is deployed in conservative religious cultures. Humour is potentially anarchic and offensive, especially humour that deals with the sacred and religion. McIntyre's interest is in religious humour, not humour about religion; that is, it is intended to be experienced and enjoyed by people in the faith community. Chapter 1, "Evangelicals, Mormons, and Popular Culture," traces how evangelical Christians and Mormons participate in popular culture. The "Mollywood" film industry makes appropriate films for Mormons, most often romantic comedies in which drinking coffee (let

alone alcohol) and hand holding (let alone kissing) are not permitted, yet couples come together in ways that charm the Mormon audience and respect its faith. The second chapter, "Introducing the Challenges of Humor," acknowledges that the type of humour that Mormons and Christians find acceptable is severely restricted, and appropriate humour must be clean. Later McIntyre notes that humour in faith contexts has humility at its core.

McIntyre admires the evangelical comedian Chonda Pierce, who "infuses her entire shows with her Christianity" (p. 87), while still being able to discuss female sexual states such as menopause and body image (which inspires her hilarious riff on Spanx, or "shapeware," the controlling undergarments that middle-aged women have recourse to in order to reinstate their waists and a more youthfully attractive female shape). McIntyre argues that such jokes avoid blasphemy and promote faith. Chapter 4, "Appropriate Humor II: Clean and Dirty Humor," explains that obscenity, foul language, and vulgarity are explicitly prohibited from humour that promotes faith and amuses the faithful. These ideas of clean and dirty humour are built upon ideas of the body either as pure or as polluted. So "swearing, toilet humor, and sexual humor" (p. 97) are not allowed in faith communities, and the importance of not corrupting children is signalled by the use of the term "family-friendly" (p. 99), which holds to strict boundaries. Clean sexual humour refers only to marriage but can be controversial. Thor Ramsay's routine concerning he and his wife experiencing IVF to have children is quite explicit in certain ways, yet acknowledges God's contribution to his family unambiguously.



The next chapter, "Appropriate Humour III: Safe and Subversive Humor," notes the distaste for humour "based solely on attacking and insulting others" (p. 135). Christian and Mormon humour is likely to be non-hostile and non-subversive. McIntyre analyses the evangelical sitcom Pastor Greg in detail, and discusses comedians including Thor Ramsey, Brad Stines, and Chonda Pierce as purveyors of riskier, critical comedy that could be perceived as hostile on occasion. Stones, in particular, practices aggressive comedy. He says "as a Christian, I am not allowed to hate people, but I'm commanded to hate ideas that are different than God's" (p. 159). The Mormon magazine Sunstone is another example of subversive humour; well-known for "witty cartoons alongside …[and] penetrating articles of social commentary" (p.163). The illustrations are very amusing, and a range of Sunstone cartoons are included. The "Conclusion" reiterates the evangelical and Mormon comedians' claim that popular culture can entertain acceptably, as long as it is not offensive to religion. McIntyre notes how religious comedians negotiate the boundaries of taste in their communities, and how they keep the goal of honouring God front and centre.

The study of religion and humour is a small subfield and there are many opportunities for it to expand. McIntyre's book is unique, as most studies treat comedy and comedians outside religion(s) making jokes about religion. Here the focus on insiders, theological humour, and the production of comedy (films, stand up, cartoons, and jokes) that the scholarly audience is likely to be entirely unfamiliar with is refreshing, entertaining, and informative. This book is highly recommended.

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