

The Religions of Canadians by Jamie S. Scott (ed.)

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Brown does not confuse history with destiny. In this regard, his work stands in marked contrast to David Kopel's sentimental *The Samurai, The Mountie and The Cowboy* (1992) which maintains that countries are captive of their history and traditions, that the United States, for example, simply cannot regulate guns because of its cowboy traditions, unlike Canada, which was founded by Mounties committed to peace, order and good government.

Brown also confronts Canada's history of racism and persistent pattern of trying to suppress firearm use by people deemed to be "a threat." The paradox of wanting some people to have guns but the "other" to be disarmed persists through the centuries, although the definition of the "other" changes—at one time aboriginal people were the target, at another it was immigrants—particularly Italians and Chinese—at another it is racialized minorities.

Perhaps the most welcome surprise is Brown's analysis of the links between guns and masculinity and his gendered perspective on the politics of the debate throughout the centuries. "Gun owners lashed out at

urban residents calling them effeminate and elitist. Ironically, even though gun owners declined as a percentage of the general population, such arguments proved remarkably effective. Firearm owners tapped effectively into anti-state sentiments, questioned government waste, employed popular conceptions of masculinity, and stoked an inaccurate belief that all rural men traditionally possessed arms. The result was the destruction of the long-gun registry." (241).

This book underscores the value of a historical perspective on important social policy issues in order to understand the forces shaping and often undermining evidence-based policy-making. While rigor and readability are uncommon bedfellows, this book is a lively and interesting, and regardless of your position on the merits of gun control, there is much to commend it.

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The Religions of Canadians

Jamie S. Scott (ed.)

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paperback. ISBN 978-1-442605-16-9. (www.utpress.utoronto.ca)

Attracted by the "motley array" of religions in our contemporary polity, Jamie Scott embarks on an analysis of the role of religion in the making of Canadian society. While recognizing the past history and present verities of Canada's "European Christian legacy" (xviii), Scott also addresses the influence of the post-1960 global diaspora of religions due

to decolonization and globalization and the magnet of western economic opportunity. He points out though, that Canada in particular had more to offer. The role of equality and multiculturalism as pillars of the Canadian *genre de vie*, protected by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, has created an environment conducive to,

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and productive of, a plural society and diverse religions. Somewhat surprisingly, he challenges the “so-called secularization hypothesis” (xxv) and recognizes evidence of “the re-enchantment of the world” and the “persistence of faith” that challenge “the passing of religion and the triumph of the modern” (xxvi). In doing so, Scott differs from Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007), which discussed the decline of religiosity and the rise of secularism in a twenty-first century in which many people turned elsewhere for personal and collective security and guidance. More support for Taylor’s point of view came when, on 9 May of this year, an article in the *Globe and Mail* summarised the results of the recent National Household Survey by its subtitle, “A Leap

for Some Faiths, But Many Canadians are Losing Their Religion” and argued that “the marked demographic trend is the increasing number of people who claim no religious affiliation at all.” Certainly, between 1981 and 2011, those declaring “no religion” had risen from 7% to 24%. But, despite these external measures, Scott argues for the continued presence of religious ideas and practices in contemporary Canada and, through a blending of historiography, phenomenology, sociology, and “thick description,” he explores the sacred, spiritual, and holy that is still part of Canada’s social and cultural landscape.

To this end, while Scott writes the Introduction, a chapter on Buddhism, and a reflexive Summary, seven other scholars provide commentaries on their religious traditions as academics, and/or as practising members of a particular faith. The structure of each chapter is the same, bracketed by an Introduction and an Afterword: a detailed exposition on the historical essential elements of each religion’s tradition; its contribution to the Canadian community; and recent trends. Each is accompanied by key terms, key dates, a list of references, and provocatively, “Key Questions for Critical Reflection.” While the intent is to educate all Canadians about current religious verities, Ontarians, and Torontonians in particular, should welcome this comprehensive and insightful commentary on trends and implications in their particular social realms.

Appropriately, given the current climate of recognition of Aboriginal rights and reconciliation of historic abuses, the study opens with an analysis of the major Aboriginal faiths. Scott argues for a better understanding of these peoples’ history of economic exploitation, oppression, abuse, and neglect within the context of their Pan-First Nations faith and ritual, which

emphasises the power of the sacred in a religio-ecological spirituality. It pervades every aspect of their life as they address the policies and prejudices that emanated from the first Indian Act of 1876, the putative revision in the Indian Act in 1951, and the silence of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982. These concerns need to be better understood in the context of a growing renaissance of Aboriginal spirituality and political identity in the contemporary *realpolitik*.

The 400-year history of the largest religious group in Canada, Catholicism and its diverse ethnic expressions, is next dealt with (p.33). This is followed by Canada's "most diverse and complex religious group," Protestantism (p.75), which has dominated Canadian ecclesiastical, social, economic, and political life, but which is contributing to its own demise by its array of new denominations and growing diversity. The next to be discussed are Canada's Jews, ubiquitous throughout the country but especially prominent in Montreal and Toronto, in their Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist expressions. Whatever their diversity, the point is made that their essential unity derives from historic anti-Semitism, the Nazi Holocaust, and their identification with Israel, "a life-force of the Jewish people in contemporary times" (p.154).

In turning to Canada's newer faiths, the point is made that Muslims constitute the second largest faith in the world and are now the second largest faith in Canada since their origin here in the nineteenth century by those who trace their roots "to Scottish ancestors" (p.167)! Indeed, the followers of Islam doubled to 580,000 between 1991 and 2001, increased to 940,000 by 2011, and it is estimated that they will reach 2.7 million in 2030. Since then, they have come to reflect the ethnic variety of the nation as

a whole and Toronto's 250 Islamic organizations demonstrate the faith's richness and variety of life. Indeed, even if there is public prejudice emanating from terrorism, women's dress codes, and erroneous depictions of ethnic practices, a flourishing Muslim life is signalled by the cultural creativity displayed through their impressive mosques (p.213), and by the popular reception of CBC's *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

The theme of positive cultural diversity is sustained in the chapters on the 300,000 Hindus whose place in our new society is protected by cultural pluralism and "benign indifference" (p.255), the Buddhists who are evolving into "a truly global religious tradition" (p.301), the Sikhs who are committed to "mutual coexistence and understanding" (p.345), and the Bahá'ís who are "working towards world unity as prerequisite to peace," which "offers the best means to achieve a new society (p.355)." While each of these faiths is rigorously analysed in terms of the historical development of their credos, there is a clear emphasis on their role in the future development of Canada.

The volume closes with a reprise of *Religions of Canadians* and comments on several post-World War II trends that have affected Canada's social and cultural landscape: changes in immigration and cultural policy; worldwide developments in the economic, social, and political realm; rights for Aboriginals, blacks, gays, and women; increased communications in a transnational world (pp.387-8). But Scott also recognizes omissions in this volume: Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christadelphians, and several others, including "New Religions" which, for various reasons, have often been received with hostility and negativity. It follows that Scott declares his analysis to be an "evolving project" and promises to take note of these neglected items and future

directions: observation of evolving trends within established religions; the direction of attention to neglected smaller religions; and finally to come to better understand the emerging expression of Canadian spirituality (p.404). Given the dynamism of

cultural values and global events, Scott promises us future editions and updates on *Religions of Canadians*.

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