Theodore John Rivers. *The Future of Religion and the Religion of the Future*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2012. 110 pages. $60.

The intriguing title of the book and its back cover description promise a historically-grounded exploration of the changing relationship between technology and religion, and a proposition that technology itself might become a new religion. The author's intriguing premise is that because both religion and technology are fundamental to human experience, the two might "merge to create a new religious experience" (vii). Thus the book initially might attract a person of faith interested in a substantive engagement with how technology and religion might mutually engage each other in the decades ahead. Or someone fascinated with humanity's ever-changing religious landscape in light of our dependency on technology might hope for some creative visioning of what the future might hold. The book, however, disappoints from both of these angles, and leaves the reader frustrated with its inadequate logic and disparaging approach to religion masquerading as an objective metaphysical analysis.

The author describes religion in terms of a constellation of manifestations that are characteristic of any religion, regardless of whether or not there is a deity associated with it: *sociability, causality, practicality, rationality,* and *belief system.* At first it appears that this phenomenological approach is meant to ensure a scientific-like objectivity towards religion. However, the author makes several dismissive comments and overgeneralizations about religion and religious people that make the reader question what the author's true objective may be. For example, he states that "those who say there is another realm, the abode of gods, spirits, and ancestors, pursue an illusion" (8). Throughout most of the book his tone is often condescending and dismissive toward religion and those who practice any religion. Consider: "Although traditional religions have lingered into the present age, their believers follow their own traditions with little reflection" (57). Aside from the insult to those of us who are believers, the statement is neither verifiable nor logical. Certainly *some* believers reflect little on religion, but many do.

I felt that there was an underlying agenda to the book that was not disclosed. It would have been helpful if the author had prefaced this project with some self-disclosure about his own personal experience and relationship with religion. Because even after his humanistic trashing of religion, he goes on to bemoan the effects of secularization on human civilization, lamenting the fact that "technology cannot answer the questions of life and death, being and nothingness, God and the cosmos" (44). The reader is left to wonder, what is the author's real objective?

Aside from this question, the biggest problem with the book lies with the author's definition of religion: "an outward expression of an inner impression that exemplifies a self-reflective social mechanism in which humanity imposes an interpretation on the world" (17). His assertion throughout the book is that religion is a completely human-generated endeavor, much like technology, which he defines as: "the practical applications of human creativity" (57). He argues that technology is a "valid candidate for a religion" (88) because it shares all of the characteristics outlined in the first chapter. He especially points to technology's omnipresence and omnipotence as key factors in its candidacy for becoming a religion: "The presence of technology is associated with its ubiquity, and its ubiquity is a characteristic of its religiosity, a characteristic that the present age perpetuates" (90).

Certainly the author makes a good point that technology has many religious characteristics, such as doctrine (scientific rationality), temples (academies and university laboratories), soteriology (technology will save us), and priesthood (scientists and engineers).

And it is true that technology "has supernatural-like characteristics" (68). However, one gets the sense that there is a fatal misstep in the author's leap to a future in which technology itself replaces religion, even if we acknowledge that secularization has overtaken human society.

What is missing is within the author's definition of religion itself. He misses a key characteristic of religion: sacredness. All religions have some aspect of "set-apart-ness," so to speak. It is precisely because technology is omnipresent and universally acknowledged as human-generated that it lacks the necessary quality of sacredness or "holy otherness" which, I would argue, is a critical mark of a religion. Technology is too much a part of who we are because it *is* who we are. It may be worshipped (technicism) and is indeed necessary to human survival. But it is does not have the capacity to *transcend* humanness, thus disqualifying it as a religion per se.

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