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## REVIEW

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Edward I. Bailey, *Implicit Religion in Contemporary Society*. Theologie & Empirie, No. 28. Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House and Weinheim, Germany: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1997. Pp. ix + 302. ISBN: 3-89271-694-3.

In this sometimes ponderous and sometimes illuminating work, Bailey chronicles his investigation into implicit religion conducted some thirty years ago in England. Bailey defines implicit religion as the commitments or foci which integrate life (8-9), commitments which may or may not intersect with or reflect the commitments of organized or institutionalized religions. He begins by developing his definition of implicit religion in conversation with a variety of perspectives drawn from the social sciences and religious studies (Chapter One) and defends his project (Chapter Two).

Chapters Three, Four and Five contain the heart of the book, detailed accounts of three studies. The first consists of a set of interviews with over a hundred persons asked to reflect on what they think and feel about life. In analyzing the results of the conversations, the author tries to see things from the speaker's perspective and then compares that perspective with others (77). Bailey constructs a three-plank creed to summarize the implicit religion he discovers from his conversation partners. The first plank deals with the self, the second with the outer world and the third with religion and morality. The creed reads: "I believe in my self, in the all-pervading influence of time and in other selves as in mine (90). As the world is in me, and I am in those I know, so I distinguish, but I decline to divide (102). Conscience commands, Christianity helps, and the world is kind; but ageing [sic] is fearful, and God is distant" (120).

For his second and third investigations,

Bailey takes the roll of participant observer, first in a public house, or pub (Chapter Four) and secondly in a residential parish he serves as rector (Chapter Five). He finds common to those who frequent the pub a relatively modest and widely shared commitment to Christianity, understood mainly as a set of rules which help people to get along with one another (188-189). More importantly, Bailey finds life in the pub to be integrated around the "idea, ideal, and ritual possibility of 'being a man,'" which requires "being able to hold your own" and to allow others to pursue the same goal with one's self (191-2). He summarizes the tacit commitments of the parish as, "I believe in Christianity; I insist on the right of everyone to make up their own mind; and I affirm the value of values" (261).

In the concluding chapter, Bailey reflects on the results of his investigations, finding in them a major commitment to the self. Bailey observes that this implicit religion involves "the sacredness of the self as its highest common factor, the sacredness of other Selves as its lowest common multiple; and the sacredness of relationships with other Selves, as its infinite extrapolation" (271). In short, the implicit religion he finds is a universalizing religion that values and seeks human well-being, thus counterbalancing more traditional religious perspectives.

While Bailey makes no explicit reference to Polanyi, members of the Society will find affinities between Bailey's arguments and Polanyi's work. For example, Bailey argues that something can be subjective, without being arbitrary or judgmental (3). He recognizes that his category of implicit religion is evaluative, not neutral, in the sense that it requires an empathy born of commitment (35). Polanyian echoes can also be heard in Bailey's discussion of the personal commitment that are part of religious belief

(83) and his rejection of subject/object thinking (263). Thus it would seem that Bailey wants to work in a post-critical framework, and this is indeed a strength of the book, along with the engaging narratives of his studies.

Nonetheless the book does not completely satisfy, for two reasons. Bailey largely works with a theoretical structure drawn from sources that are at least 40 years old. In making this point, I do not mean to suggest that Eliade, Lippman, Tillich, Weber and a host of others are intellectual fossils who have no contemporary relevance. Instead, I mean to suggest that the author owes us a more detailed and up-to-date defense of a conceptual structure that has taken a number of serious hits over the past 10-15 years. To be sure, Bailey does tip his hat to recent developments in Religious Studies and Postmodern thought in both the first and last chapters, but he only offers a list of references to these works; he does not engage them critically. Secondly, the book begs for more critical engagement with the content of this implicit religion. (Perhaps this is simply the cranky complaint of a theologian, not a social scientist; perhaps Bailey intends to offer such an evaluation in the future). Nevertheless, I am left wondering what to make of this implicit religion. Is this religion of humaneness something to be celebrated (as Bailey seems to do)? Is it a cause of concern? Is it both reason for celebration and concern? Some would see in it a significant and seemingly widespread departure from central themes of the Christian tradition—even among its own adherents. For example, the celebration of the self runs counter to longstanding strands of mainstream Christianity that maintain life is not about self-fulfillment, but about serving God, for whom the fulfillment of individual selves is not an ultimate concern. Others would see in Bailey's description of implicit religion a disturbing trend toward individualized religion. My point is that it is not obvious that the implicit commitments of these people are completely laudatory and the book would benefit from such critical reflection.

Paul Lewis  
High Point, NC

## Polanyi Society Membership

*Tradition and Discovery* is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. This periodical supercedes a newsletter and earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries though most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally three issues of *TAD* each year.

Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$20 (\$10 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Humanities, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5987, e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu) Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing. The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and/or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

### Electronic Discussion Group

**The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 E-MAIL: [apczynski@sbu.edu](mailto:apczynski@sbu.edu) PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.**