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Pedlar, James E. Review of *Jesus in Disneyland*, by David Lyon. *Word & Deed: A Salvationist Journal of Theology and Ministry* 4, no. 2 (May 2002): 75-77.

Book Reviews

Lyon, David, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*
Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000. 188 pp.
Reviewed by James Pedlar, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario

Disneyland has become a popular conceptual tool for social theory, particularly among those theorists who deal with developments in contemporary Western culture. Some readers may be familiar with Jean Baudrillard's controversial proclamation of Disneyland as the "real America." David Lyon, a Canadian sociologist and evangelical Christian, is not nearly this radical, although he sees much in the Disneyland experience that mirrors cultural conditions. His book presents a broad-ranging and accessible introduction to some major developments in Western culture and probes the implications of these developments for religion.

Lyon takes as his point of departure a 1996 evangelistic crusade which was held in the Disneyland park in California, using this event as a central metaphor for his exploration of religion in what he terms "post-modern times." In using the term "postmodern," he does not propose that modernity itself has somehow come to an end, but rather that modernity is now in question, and a new social order is emerging. This new order is, according to Lyon, profoundly influenced by the development of communication and information technologies and the growth of consumerism, and could be described as "Disneysque." A virtual fantasy world of simulated and commodified experiences is emerging. The social meanings of both time and space are compressed, reducing history is to nostal-

gia, as the future recedes into an ever-expanding present, and individuals move from "site" to "site" in cyberspace without leaving their chair. "Postmodern" is simply Lyon's form of shorthand for describing these social conditions.

Lyon outlines a number of ways in which these developments are creating problems for traditional forms of religion. Pervasive consumerism leads to an attitude among "seekers" that they can pick and choose from a wide variety of belief systems in the way which best suits their needs. Excessive individualism and a "secularization of the self," as seen in many current "spirituality" movements, leads to an increasing attunement to the "inner voice" and a delegitimation of external voices of authority. Choice has replaced constraint as a central value, undermining the ethical dimension of religion. The above-mentioned shift in social understandings of time and space has the potential to undermine both shared memory and hope for the future, which are central to our message.

But Lyon is also quick to point to the deficiencies of traditional sociological theories of secularization, which hold that religion will continue to decline in significance as humanity develops an increasingly rational-scientific worldview. Religion, according to Lyon, has been "deregulated," but continues to play an important role. It seems that Western societies are open to the belief in God and a quest for authentic spirituality. While this does not translate into bodies in the pews, one can certainly see that there is potential for evangelism in these conditions. However, Lyon does not go so far as fellow Canadian Reginald Bibby, who has argued in his 1993 book, *Unknown Gods*, that the failure of religious groups to grow in this environment is a result of the failure to identify markets and deliver products. Unfortunately, such blatant acceptance of consumerism is seen in some church growth methods. One of the problems that Lyon raises with such an approach is that it leaves the Church without a prophetic voice. How can the Church maintain a critical voice in a culture that is based on fast, friendly and guiltless consumption? What aspects of consumerism, if any, can we adopt for the sake of evangelism without losing our theological integrity?

Dialogue is clearly needed between the cultural and theological disciplines. Certainly there are elements of the contemporary cultural setting which need to be actively resisted by The Salvation Army, and the need is just as great for a critical look at evangelical culture itself. It is striking how much time and energy was spent by the leaders of the early Army in attempting to correct misconceptions

among the soldiery and the Church at large. This is seen most clearly in Catherine Booth's *Popular Christianity*. Such attention to popular Christianity and salvationism today would be fruitful, keeping in mind the trends towards consumerism and self-absorption which are seen in the broader context. One can certainly see both of these themes emerging in the content and packaging of some contemporary worship music over the past few years or even in the marketing of Christian products in general. Lyon's work causes us to question such developments and highlights the need for teaching and correction to be both theologically grounded and culturally aware.

This book does cover a lot of ground and some knowledge of social theory would be helpful for the reader, although this is by no means required. I would recommend it to any who are interested in keeping abreast of the critical issues raised by developments in contemporary Western culture.