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The spiritual Tolkien milieu : a study of fiction-based religion

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The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu: A Study of Fiction-based Religion

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door Markus Altena Davidsen

1. Fiction-based religion differs from 'history'-based religion in that its main authoritative texts do not claim to tell of actual events, and from fandom and play in that parts of the supernatural inventory of the authoritative texts is claimed to exist within the actual world.
2. J.R.R. Tolkien's letters and other writings demonstrate that he was interested in, and possibly believed in, occult phenomena, such as ancestral memory regression and the reality of a Faery Otherworld.
3. The spiritual Tolkien milieu constitutes a sub-milieu within the cultic milieu.
4. In Tolkien religion, folk rationalisations gravitate towards a balance between fabulousness and plausibility.
5. If Tolkien spirituality is anything to go by, contemporary religion is not experiencing a metaphorical turn.
6. Methodological naturalism is a necessary foundation for social-scientific theorising about religion. Only by assuming that supernatural forces do not exist, does it become possible to theorise religion as a human and social construction. Methodological agnosticism, which leaves open the ontological status of the supernatural, limits the ambitions of the study of religion to mere description.

7. Religious beliefs are signs which cannot possibly be referential, but which nevertheless contain within them, *as part of their meaning*, the insistence that they refer to supernatural states and agents in the actual world.
8. A narrative's usability as an authoritative text for religion is dependent on the presence of religious affordances. Furthermore, the particular set of religious affordances possessed by a given narrative can roughly predict the nature which religion based on that narrative will take.
9. The pejorative connotation of the concept syncretism has inhibited the development of a theory of religious blending.
10. Scholars of online religion have severely overestimated the distinctiveness and vitality of religion on the Internet.
11. The semiotic core of any given religious tradition is comprised of beliefs, experiences, and practices that assume the existence of supernatural agents in a literal sense (elemental religion); non-literal beliefs arise only through subsequent rationalisation and mainly to enhance the plausibility of elemental religion.
12. To better understand religion, scholars of religion must prioritise the study of religious practice (i.e. what religious people do) over the study of religious discourse (i.e. what religious people say that they do).
13. The success of departments and study programmes focused on religion depends on the understanding of the study of religion as a discipline rather than an interdisciplinary research field.
14. In externally funded research projects, strict adherence to the original research plan may well facilitate completion on time, but inhibits creativity and limits the academic significance of the work.