BASR bulletin

British Association for the Study of Religions

142: May 2023

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ABOUT THE BASR

The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) was founded in 1954. It is a member association of the International Association for the History of Religions (founded 1950) and of the European Association for the Study of Religions (founded 2001). The object of BASR is to promote the academic study of religion/s, understood as the historical, social, theoretical, critical and comparative study of religion/s through the interdisciplinary collaboration of all scholars whose research is defined in this way. BASR is not a forum for confessional, apologetic, or similar concerns. BASR pursues its aims principally through an annual conference and general meeting, a regular Bulletin, and a Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. Membership of BASR is open to all scholars normally resident in the United Kingdom.

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COMMITTEE

editorial

Welcome to the May Bulletin. Stephen and Theo have asked me to write the Editorial for this issue, primarily as a way to draw attention to our upcoming BASR Annual Conference, which this year will focus on the theme "Environmental Endings and Religious Futures".

The Committee are delighted that the event – to be held in the stunning Clare College, Cambridge on the 11th to the 13th September 2023 – will be run in partnership with The Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM). Such partnerships are increasingly important for educational charities like BASR, bringing both invaluable scholarly collaboration and welcome practical and financial support. Having been 'established to promote high quality critical and academic research into apocalyptic and millenarian movements across time, place and culture', CenSAMM stands as a true intellectual ally of BASR.

The committee are equally excited about the two excellent keynote speakers we have lined up for BASR 2023. First, on day one of our conference, Prof. Catherine Wessinger (Professor of the History of Religions, Loyola University New Orleans), will speak on the theme 'Why Study Millennialism Today?' The author of ten books, Prof. Wessinger is a world-leader in the fields of Millennial Studies and NRM Studies, having edited the definitive Oxford Handbook of Millennialism as well as having served as co-general editor of *Nova Religio*. Given that Prof. Wessinger's keynote will be delivered on the anniversary of 9/11, as well as discussing the contemporary importance of the study of millennialism to the discipline of Religious Studies, she will also reflect on the millennial themes pertinent to the September 11 attacks.

Second, on day two of the conference, reflecting directly on our theme of environment, Dr Katherine Swancutt (Reader in Social Anthropology at KCL) will give a keynote about her current ERC project 'Cosmological Visionaries: Shamans, Scientists, and Climate Change at the Ethnic Borderlands of China and Russia.' In short, Dr Swancutt's project 'explores what global environmental initiatives of the future will look like'. By 'starting from the position that cosmology often evokes religious ways of knowing or being', her research asks 'how can scientists, shamans, priests, and other indigenous holders of animistic knowledge collaborate in regions of climatic vulnerability?' As an Anthropologist who collaborates directly with Religious Studies scholars, Dr Swancutt's keynote showcasing her most recent ethnographic findings from China will surely stimulate much discussion among delegates as we enjoy the best of what Cambridge has to offer – a full gala dinner at Clare College, but minus the meat, as we continue to shrink our carbon footprint.

Taking a step back, it is hard to think of a more relevant and pressing conference theme than that of "Environmental Endings and Religious Futures" – both for our discipline of Religious Studies, and for the world in which we live. Although I might (understandably enough) be accused of having succumbed to an apocalyptic form of apophenia following a decade of research among the Exclusive Brethren and Jehovah's Witnesses, try as I might, I can't help but feel surrounded by a vast constellation of (often utterly tragic) 'signs of the times' which my ethnographic interlocutors constantly draw to my attention. The climate crisis, COVID, the war in Ukraine, the Turkey-Syria earthquake, renewed threats of political violence in Northern Ireland as a result of Brexit, supermarket food shortages, unprecedented strike action – many of these and

other 'signs' can (and for many communities, do) constitute an impending end, if not of the whole world, then certainly to the world as we know it.

Importantly, it is my hope that BASR members will read into the conference theme "Environmental Endings and Religious Futures" the same breadth and malleability that we intended to write into it. The thematic diversity of our two keynotes can, I think, be taken as evidence of this. As such, I would encourage all BASR members – as well as potential new members! – to submit abstracts for papers to BASRconference2023@gmail.com by the 1st June deadline. Whilst we particularly encourage paper and panel proposals which directly engage with this year's theme, we aren't strictly limiting ourselves to the topics outlined in the call for papers, so nor should you, especially if your current research is taking you in a very different direction.

Lastly, please do share the BASR 2023 call for papers as widely as you can among your various networks, and particularly to postgraduate, postdoctoral, and early career colleagues, given the level of financial support we have committed to help increase participation among these cohorts. The success of any academic conference is dependent upon the willingness of delegates to support the event by sharing their research with a community of like-minded scholars, and BASR 2023 will be no different.

That's all for now. We hope you enjoy the rest of this bulletin, and we look forward to welcoming you to Cambridge in September!

Joe Webster,
BASR Committee Member

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VERNACULAR RELIGION

AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY PRIZES AND AWARDS OF INTEREST TO BASR MEMBERS

Many BASR members will be familiar with the work of Vernacular Religion scholar Leonard Norman Primiano, who died in July 2021 (see Bulletin 139 for his obituary); and some of you may have met him at the BASR conference in 2014.

The bulk of Leonard's estate has gone to the support of new awards and activities for the American Folklore Society's Folk Belief and Religious Folklife Section, of which he was founding co-chair, and with which he was significantly involved throughout his career.

I have been working with the FBRF section's Margaret Kruesi and Ben Danner to start bringing Leonard's wishes to fruition and we urge Bulletin readers to look at the new awards and apply – and/or encourage post graduate students to apply - as appropriate. The new awards include:

- Leonard Norman Primiano Book Prize on Vernacular Catholicism
- Leonard Norman Primiano Graduate Student Travel Award
- Leonard Norman Primiano Retired Scholar Travel Award

In addition, please look at the Folk Belief and Religious Folklife Section site for information about the other essay prizes awarded by the section, as they are keen to broaden the participation in these too. Please note the cut-off submission date for the essay prizes is 1 June.

Leonard wanted the rich and significant European scholarship on vernacular religion to be represented in relation to the book prize, and for vernacular religion scholars internationally to continue to engage in meaningful exploration of this amazingly rich and fascinating field.

You can find details of all these prizes by searching: https://americanfolkloresociety.org/our-work/prizes/

Marion Bowman,
Open University

BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023:

ENVIRONMENTAL ENDINGS AND RELIGIOUS FUTURES

In collaboration with CenSAMM
Clare College, Cambridge
11 – 13 September

Keynote Speakers:
Professor Catherine Wessinger, Professor of the History of Religions, Loyola University New Orleans.
Dr. Katherine Swancutt, Reader in Social Anthropology, King's College London.

Call for Papers:
Religions have long offered frameworks of meaning for concepts of world ending. Amid the contemporary social and political importance of climate change and fears about environmental degradation, ideas of world ending and widespread cataclysm have become pressing in both religious and secular contexts. Equally, as apocalyptic discourses proliferate, so too do human imaginations of the future, with optimistic and pessimistic narratives of the post-apocalyptic world jostling for attention. Reflecting on these overlapping strands, the theme of this year's annual conference is "Environmental Endings and Religious Futures." Held in collaboration with the Centre for the Critical Study of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements (CenSAMM), BASR 2023 invites submissions reflecting on how religion interacts with narratives of environmental decline, catastrophe, hope, and renewal. We also invite submissions reflecting on the connections and tensions between religious practice, environmental activism, and climate justice (as well as passivity and injustice). We also welcome critical and methodological studies of the ways Religious Studies scholars might seek to understand and evaluate the complex ways that religious beliefs and practices interact with contemporary concerns about imminent environmental cataclysm.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- Method and theory in the study of contemporary apocalyptic discourse
- Ethnography as an approach to environmental movements and religious movements
- Religious themes in the politics of environmentalism
- Quietism and passivism in the face of the Apocalypse
- Rethinking ritual in the context of climate change
- Religion, climate crisis, and hope: human imaginations of good and bad endings
- Religion, environment, and gender
- A human-led apocalypse? Religion during the Anthropocene
- Stewardship, extractivism, and the spirit of capitalism

- Religion, environment, racism, and privilege
- Religion, climate activism, and climate change denial
- Environmental endings and indigenous religion
- Lived religion in a dying environment
- Environmental healing and alternative religious futures
- Religion and environmental policy
- Understanding "renewal": millennial, environmental, technological
- Responses to the climate crisis within New Religious Movements
- Religion and climate injustice in the Global South

Individual Paper Proposals:
Please submit title and abstract of 200 words. All paper proposals should also include the name, title, affiliation (or most recent affiliation), and email address of the presenter. Individually submitted papers will be grouped into 90 minute thematic panels comprising of three papers (with each speaker given 20 minutes to present plus 10 minutes for questions).

Full Panel Proposals:
Please submit abstracts of 200 words for panel proposals. All panel proposals should also include the name, title, affiliation (or most recent affiliation), and email address of each presenter plus the chair and discussant (if applicable) plus abstracts for each of the individual papers on the panel. Full panel proposals will follow the same 90 minute format outlined above.

Roundtable Proposals:
Please submit a title and abstract of 400 words describing the theme to be discussed. All roundtable proposals should also include the name, title, affiliation (or most recent affiliation), and email address of each contributor. Roundtables will last 90 minutes and should include time for discussion from the floor.

Other Formats:
We welcome other presentation formats. Please submit such proposals to the email address below, outlining all the necessary details.

All Proposals:
Please submit to BASRconference2023@gmail.com by 1st June 2023.
Confirmation of acceptance by 16th June 2023.

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Cover and page 26 - Chalice Well Gardens, Glastonbury, 2023, Sivani Mata Francis

Page 3 - Beltane preparations, Glastonbury, 2023, Jaqueline Hosein

Page 9 - Roundtable at BASR 2023, David Robertson

Page 26 - Photograph of Frank Whaling courtesty of Mrs Margaret Whaling

features

"It's a cult, Jim, but not as we know it"

Trying to Decipher the Hybridised Deployment of the 'C-Word' in the 21st Century

Aled Thomas, University of Leeds
Edward Graham-Hyde, University of Central Lancashire

Whether you are a fan of a 'cult band' or watched the recent *Waco: American Apocalypse* documentary on Netflix, it is likely that you encounter varied uses of the term 'cult' on a regular basis. Infamous in the scholarly Study of Religion (SoR) (particularly the sociology of religion) for its highly subjective nature, the term enjoys popular use for a variety of purposes outside the bounds of our field. For some scholars of New Religious Movements (NRMs), the term 'cult' has become a persistent nuisance, often dominating conversations surrounding minority religions to the extent that potentially distract researchers from useful research. Yet, as use of the term continues to transition into other areas of public life, we as scholars are presented with new opportunities to revisit how the term is understood, why it is used, and how it can inform our understanding of the lived realities of those who use it.

Public discourses surrounding 'cults' during the establishment of the field of 'NRM Studies' were mostly concerned with minority religious groups deemed as socially deviant or harmful. However, paying close attention to contemporary use of the term demonstrates a shift from religious models to hybrids of political and religious issues (Thomas and Graham-Hyde forthcoming). These range from accusations of 'political cults', such as the 'Cult of Trump' (Crockford 2023), to debates surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine and emergence of political/religious groups such QAnon (Graham-Hyde 2023). It is clear that public deployment of the term, and the issues/movements associated with it, require a renewed approach from scholars – one that can benefit both the field of NRM Studies and wider SoR.

During the 2022 BASR conference (co-sponsored by Inform) at the Open University, we chaired a roundtable on 'Cult Rhetoric in the 21st Century'. Intended as a discussion amongst contributors to our forthcoming volume of the same title, the panel was enriched by valuable contributions from the audience, many of whom specialise in areas beyond the remit typically associated with NRM Studies. A dominant theme of the discussion was the relationship between scholars of new religions and their research participants, and the role of academics in policing the boundaries of the ways language is used in everyday vernacular. Moreover, has the study of new religions (broadly conceived), in its attempt to seek an approach free of the cultural bias of the term 'cult', largely ignored the testimonies of former members of NRMs who understand their experiences through 'cultic' frameworks?

Those who specialise in the study of new religions will be familiar with the issue of 'cult apologism'; an accusation often levelled towards NRM researchers for what is perceived as an overly sympathetic approach to new religions (or often by simply referring to these groups as 'religions'). While this issue is steeped in the 'cult wars' of the 1970-80s (see Gallagher 2017 for a detailed overview), scholars of new religions have prioritised avoiding the term in preference of a more 'neutral' option (though it must be noted that the term 'new religious movement' remains contested). Avoiding the term has not only been useful from a scholarly perspective, but also in highlighting the potential harm of the 'cult' label in oppressing minorities and countering those who challenge normativity. Nonetheless, as audience members at the roundtable agreed, the field has historically dismissed valuable ex-member testimonies in favour of the 'insider' perspective (however, recent scholarship in the field of NRMs has discussed and supported the use of ex-member testimonies – see Gregg and Chryssides 2017; Chryssides 2019). Such dismissal can result in interesting angles of new religious practices going undocumented, at best, and the silencing of survivor narratives at worst. Indeed, recent research projects in the wider SoR, such as 'Abuse in Religious Settings' , demonstrate how the study of ex-member narratives can be transformative outside the ivory towers of academia. Accordingly, the ways in which survivors of abuse frame their experiences as that of a cult can be a crucial aspect of their recovery, raising questions on the circumstances in which scholars of NRMs should police these boundaries outside their work.

We should note that we do not advocate use of the term 'cult' as a singular scholarly category. As it has been extensively discussed in the history of the field, the term is now too entrenched in cultural biases and subjectivity to meet the demands of scholarly rigour (see Zeller 2022). Yet, as the aforementioned rise of groups such as QAnon and hybridised nature of the term demonstrate, scholars must now revisit the term and consider how the public landscape has shifted since the 'cult wars' (Thomas and Graham-Hyde forthcoming).

Having reflected upon the BASR roundtable, we continued to reevaluate our theoretical frameworks when discussing research participant's testimonies. Whilst we agree with Benjamin Zeller (2022) that the term 'cult' has little utility for scholars, we do now accept the importance of the term when used by ex-members. The popular pejorative usage of the term has linguistic meaning to the individual and this is an interesting avenue of exploration. Of course, as reflected by the attendees to the roundtable discussion, multi-disciplinary approaches must become the norm for the SoR.

The roundtable discussion became a helpful scaffolding that further developed our thoughts on how to move forward as a field. In our upcoming chapter (Thomas and Graham-Hyde forthcoming) we have sought to share the proverbial scaffolding as a suggestion of how future discussions can be framed. We outlined three core principles that we have found helpful in rethinking our approach to 'cults':

(i) *Removing the agenda from dialogue.* Whether the agenda is malignant or benign, everyone involved in the discussion has one. As scholars, we must continue to persevere in reporting on all collected data without feeling the pressure to gate-keep findings that are 'too controversial' for publication. Not only can religious organisations defend themselves they must also be challenged for any abusive practices or conduct.

(ii) *Leaving the ivory tower.* There is a tidal wave of podcasts, documentaries, and blogs that discuss 'cults' and propagates a misconceived popular view – often due to a 'clickbait' culture to entice readership. Nevertheless, scholars should continue to build bridges and walk across them, because many of these individuals will not be the first to cross the divide. Why should they? The vast majority of our work is hidden behind often-significant paywalls that renders it

inaccessible, and the publications they can access are often critical of their position and this further polarises the discourse as they perceive it.

(iii) *Justification for using the term.* As stated, the term 'cult' has little scholarly utility beyond creating a catchy title hoping to win a reader (other than the peer reviewers and editor – a woeful reality that George D. Chryssides reminded us all of at the BASR conference!). With the usage of the term 'cult' leaking into other fields of study, scholars of religion need to (more than ever) act as guides to other fields, perhaps through extending olive branches and inviting misguided colleagues to collaborate in research – ensuring a robust and scholarly multidisciplinary approach to understanding the tapestry of religion in 21st century life.

Overall, the BASR roundtable highlighted that this renewed approach to how 'cults' are understood in public life has value across the interdisciplinary SoR, bringing together specialists in new religions, spiritual abuse, political science – amongst many others! These discussions surrounding 'cults' have further highlighted how religion is deeply embedded in all aspects of public life, and the immense value and potential of both the SoR and the BASR in understanding these.

The 'Cult Rhetoric in the 21st Century' Roundtable at BASR 2023. Photo by David Robertson.

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Chryssides, G. (2019), 'Moving Out: Disengagement and Ex-Membership in New Religious Movements', in Chryssides, G. D. and Gregg, S. E. (eds.), *The Insider/Outsider Debate: New Perspectives in the Study of Religion.* Sheffield: Equinox, 371-392.

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Graham-Hyde, E. (2023), 'From Bad to Worse: The Evolving Nature of "Cult" Rhetoric in the Wake of COVID-19 and QAnon', *Implicit Religion*, 24 (2), 135-159.

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Thomas, A. and Graham-Hyde, E. (Forthcoming), '"Cult" Rhetoric in the 21st Century: The Disconnect Between Popular Discourse and the Ivory Tower', in Thomas, A. and Graham-Hyde, E. (eds.), *'Cult' Rhetoric in the 21st Century: Deconstructing the Study of New Religious Movements,* Bloomsbury.

Zeller, B. E. (2022) 'Cult', in Chryssides G. D. and Whitehead, A. (eds.), *Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion: A Critical Exploration*, London: Bloomsbury, 27-31.

TRANS-STATES 2022: THE ART OF DECEPTION

Following 'The Art of Crossing Over' in 2016 and 2019's 'The Art of Revelation', Trans-States returned this year with 'The Art of Deception'. Inspired by The Magician card of the tarot (just as previous years had been inspired by The Hanged Man and The Tower, respectively), Trans-States 2022 brought together its usual eclectic, interdisciplinary tribe of academics, practitioners and performers (often all three) to "explore the complex interrelationships between contemporary occulture, deception, persuasion, trickery, manipulation, communication, mastery, craftiness, sleight of hand, commerce, technē, technology, and techgnosis".

Oddly, the Trickster aspect of The Magician often manifested not just as a theme but as gremlin in the machine. A number of technical glitches occurred which, rather than irritate and delay, were seamlessly, and often amusingly integrated into the overall theme of the two days.

Technology was a key topic throughout the conference. Not for nothing was panel entitled Technology, Language and Code. Indeed, the opening key note was by Erik Davis, author of the indispensable investigation of the interplay of the occult and cyberculture, *Techgnosis* (1998). Erik's talk was impish and erudite and typically wide-ranging mix of ideas drawing on Lacan, Latour and a number of flying penises. Meanwhile, the technology itself seemed happy to comply when it really needed to. Multimedia performances such Oryelle Defenstrate-Bascule's 'Hermes' combined dance and film, while Yoshe's astonishing 'Cyberfeminist Reimaginings: The Transformative Power of Motion Sensor Technology' utilised gloves that turned their body into an instrument, creating music through dance. New forms of embodiment through technology could also be experienced by attendees themselves via Adam Malone's 'Virtual Reality Tarot Experience' and Sonja Rendtorff's 'Daimon Says', a VR environment composed of mobile, shifting, symbolic forms drawn from intercations with their 'dream daimon'. Meanwhile, Aaron J. French spoke on 'The Magic of Technology: Rudolf Steiners Ro-scrucianism and the UFO Phenomenon', Heather D Freeman explored magical practices in social media and VR in 'Liminal Means: Navigating experiential magic and the physical body within digital spaces'. On the same panel, Karin Valis's 'Language in the Age of AI: Deciphering the Voynich Manuscript' investigated the use of state of the art algorithms to decipher that famously mysterious 15th Century manuscript.

The productive tensions between esotericism and how it might be approached through an academic lens - perhaps one of Trans-States greatest strengths - was in evidence in panels such as Historical Perspectives on the Esoteric and Esoteric Artists; (Oc)cultural Producers; and a closing discussion concerning A Methodology for Curating Esoteric Art and Propagating Rhizomatic Occulture. Elsewhere, Dr Bernd-Christian Otto described the comprehensive scholarly agenda of the German Research Foundation funded project, Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective, set to be one of the largest esotericism-focused academic research project for the next several years.

Professor Christine Ferguson's keynote talk also addressed the methodological issues involved in the site-specific research for the AHRC funded project on the Material Culture of Modern Occultism. Her observation that scholars of esotericism might do well to consider their inclination to think things are not controversial in the real world, because they are no longer considered controversial as objects of study in academia, resonated with my own experience. Perhaps it was the echo of Jeff Howard's talk on Ludomancy, or "games as occult practice" and its memory of the Satanic Panic of the 1980s.
In that light, it is instructive to consider a sample of the topics explored and wonder how anyone

who was not an esoteric scholar might react. Would they be perplexed or delighted by The Inner Space Exploration Unit's (ISEU) collaborative art project, where, separated by geography and the restrictions of the COVID-19 lockdown, they encountered otherworldly presences from Dartmoor and the shade of Boris Karloff? Perhaps they might be persuaded by the talks positioning comics, role-plying games, the music of Coil, the films of David Lynch, or the manga *FullMetal Alchemist* within an occultural context? Perhaps we might be surprised instead to find our imaginary companion already on board instead? Western comics and Manga are no longer the fringe interests they once were, nor role-playing games and the film of David Lynch. Even outside of Trans-States, perhaps occulture is increasingly just culture.

One of the Magician's skills is to upend or undermine the audience's sense of reality, truth and falsity. This was a theme picked up by the current author where I explored 'Acid Communism and Anarcho-Mysticisms', drawing from cultural theorist Mark Fisher to consider a history of esoteric resistance. Kasper Ospstrup's 'Dree Your Own Weird: How the Fictional Occult Bleeds into the Real' explored similar territory, considering the intersection (threshold?) between the 'real' and 'fiction' and the political implications of imagining other worlds.

All of these strands came together in Danny Nemu's final, dazzlingly inventive lecture on 'Magickal Mycelia, Networked Intelligence and the Mouldy Way to Grow Your NGO', which was pitched somewhere between stand-up routine, conference paper and magical ritual. This performance ended with a number of attendees sticking chewed oats to cardboard, from which Danny intended to grow slime moulds, a living sigil reflecting a new mycelial collective intelligence better equipped for the global challenges our global village faces in the twenty-first century. Word count precludes more detail alas, but this highlight will certainly be worth seeking out once the Trans-States team upload this year's videos to their dedicated YouTube channel.

The conference ended with chaos magician luminary Lionel Snell's charming keynote talk, during which he impishly suggested that, "a reality is a space where magic is forbidden", a nice summary of magic's threat to the status quo (whether political, ontological and epistemological). Exiting the two-day conference to a notably bright and well-timed, hour-long rainbow hanging in the sky, the early evening air echoed with chatter of epistemology, ontology and agency (human and otherwise) colliding with more obviously political questions regarding the kind(s) of worlds we might want to (co-)create. Whose reality is it anyway?

In Trans-States 2022, organiser Cavan MacLaughlin and curator Elizabeth Tomos have once again created an event both inspiring and intellectually exciting. It's gratifying mix of names both familiar and new, as well as the canny use of Northampton's own environs in an after show of stage magic and musical performance, facilitates a real sense of being part of something bigger than just a dry, academic conference. To the extent that MacLaughlin and Tomos have always understood the project as having "a certain 'life' of its own", they have succeeded. One hopes it is not too long before Trans-States draws its next card from the deck.

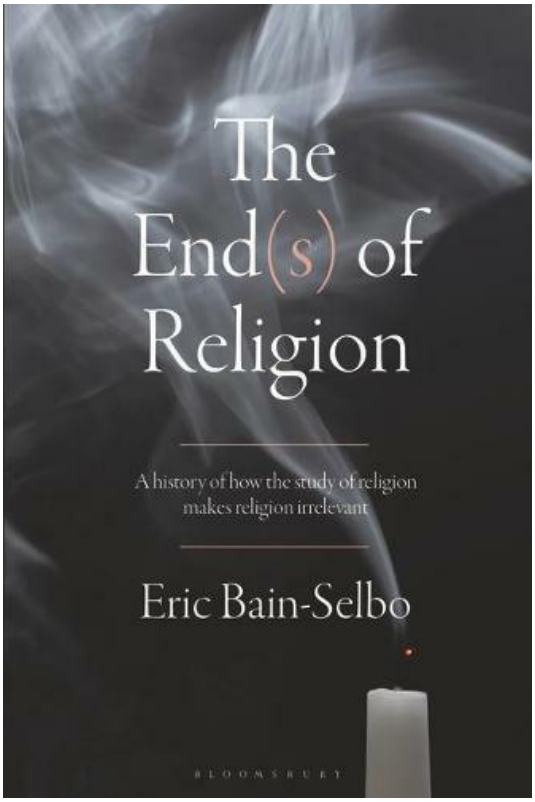
A full programme for Trans-States 2022 can be found here: https://trans-states.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Trans-States-3-Programme-and-Exhibition-Catalogue.pdf

Scott Jeffery,
University of the Highlands and Islands

reviews

BAIN-SELBO, ERIC. (2022) THE END(S) OF RELIGION: A HISTORY OF HOW THE STUDY OF RELIGION MAKES RELIGION IRRELEVANT. BLOOMSBURY.

Bain-Selbo aims this provocatively titled book at "the educated reader" and at students who want to learn "something about the study of religion, our present situation (particularly in the Western world), and how religion may factor (or not) in our future" (p. viii). A bit later the book is re-presented as "a story that informs our present moment in the Western world" and as one that "provides us some insight into the future … of institutional religion" and how "human beings detached from … [institutional] religion will meet some of their basic human needs in different ways" (p. 1). The first four chapters of the book sketch a history of Western philosophical, sociological, psychological and theological accounts of religion covering Kant, Hegel, Durkheim, Weber, Freud, Jung, Eliade and Tillich. There is also significant discussion of Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Marx and affect theory. Briefly, according to Bain-Selbo, this history is implicated not only in how religion has come to be understood today but also in a process called secularization (p. 113) that augurs the decline in particular of institutional religion and, in the future, the likely satisfaction of "religious needs" (p. 4) by what he calls the "religion of culture" (p. 3) – that is to say by sport, nationalism, music, and fandom among others. As such, the fifth chapter of the book focuses on the religion of culture and looks at music, festivals, film, sport, nationalism and consumption while the final chapter – 'What Happens Next?' – considers the future of institutional religion and the future of humanity, while a 'Postscript' adds a further layer of reflection on the 'what next?' question by looking again at consumption. Here Bain-Selbo engages with the ideas of Zizek, MacIntyre, Putnam, Debord and Bauman to assess whether the religion of culture has enough depth to resist the allegedly inevitable *anomie* of modernity. Significant interlocutors through these latter sections are the philosophers Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty, notably their respective ideas on modernity and secularism and contingency, irony and solidarity. In the remainder of this review, I will do two things: firstly, I will explore Bain-Selbo's concept of "religious needs" and secondly, I will address the Western-centric canon that he has placed at the centre of the book. Firstly, I'm not at all sure that I agree with his concept of "religious needs" and his accompanying claim that while they were satisfied in the past by institutional religion, in the future they will increasingly be satisfied by the religion of culture. This claim requires that we assent to the idea that "human beings have some fairly stable needs and desires (some of which can be considered religious), and that those needs and desires can be met in stereotypically religious ways (institutional religion) but also through a variety of cultural phenomena" (p. 201). As Bain-Selbo notes in his



discussion of Zygmunt Bauman, consumption, and liquid modernity (pp. 215-220), the "most important products are desires themselves" (p. 216). If needs and desires can be generated within (stratified) contexts of discipline and training, then it might be productive to dispense with the idea of an invariant human nature and instead focus, pace Foucault and Butler, on the intersections of power and the body to interrogate the historical and cultural specificities of needs and desires.

When it comes to the canon of scholarship on religion that Bain-Selbo has chosen to privilege in the book, it seems apposite to highlight the slippages he makes from the "Western world" (p. 4) to the "future of humanity" (p. 189). On the one hand he acknowledges the cultural and historical particularity of the Western conversation about religion, but then reinforces the hegemony of that conversation by tying it to the whole world's future. Bain-Selbo acknowledges that he has foregrounded "Western, white men" and the "topics that they found important", but counters that his chapter on the religion of culture "has a richer diversity of scholars" (p. 193). I think a lot more can and needs to be done to deconstruct, decolonise and re-think the canon, not only by Bain-Selbo here, but across the field by all of us (including me). I also think that Bain-Selbo's argument about secularization and the religion of culture simply does not work when applied to non-Western historical periods and cultural contexts. In Southeast Asia, religious and social worlds tend not to be defined by private assent to exclusive propositional beliefs, but rather by practices drawn from a blend of repertoires (Clifford Geertz's description of the *slametan* feast constitutes a classic example), which would suggest that if (for instance) religious pluralism has been an agent of secularization in the West, its secularizing impact in Southeast Asia has been negligible. Notwithstanding these criticisms, this is a well-written and accessible introduction to the study of religion which will be of interest to students and educated readers alike.

Paul-François Tremlett,
The Open University

DRISCOLL, CHRISTOPHER M. (2023) WHITE DEVILS, BLACK GODS: RACE, MASCULINITY, AND RELIGIOUS CODEPENDENCY. BLOOMSBURY.

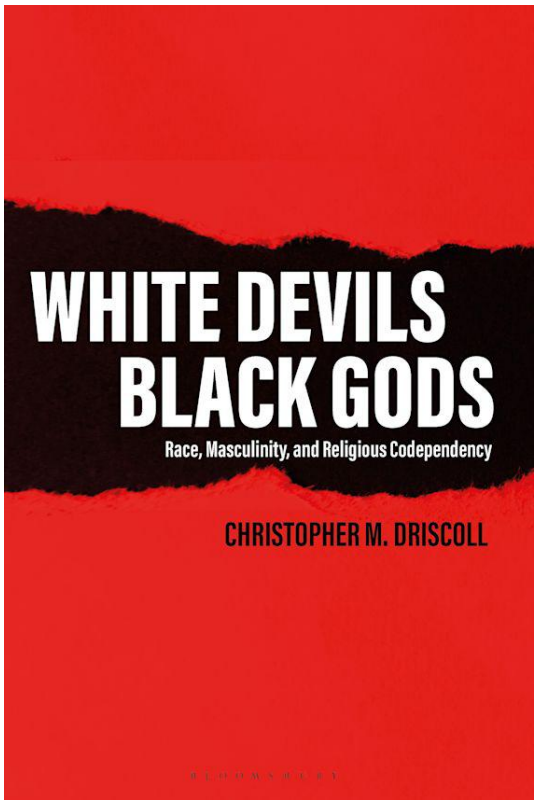
The trope of whites as devils is an old one in African American society. It reaches back into the time of slavery, when the slavemaster would often provoke comparison to a devil. But it was made famous by Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, which taught that white Europeans were an artificially-created abomination of the crazy scientist Yakub, lacking in spirituality and morality, hence congenitally predisposed to wickedness. Inverting the racist trope of Blacks as subhuman, Muhammad reimagined Blacks as the original human, and the whites who persecuted them as inferior. In *White Devils* Driscoll tackles this concept, touching as well on the corollary proposition developed in the NOI splinter group, The Nation of Gods and Earths (or Five Percenters), that Black men are Gods.

I had initially expected this book to be an analysis of the *rhetoric* of "white devils", investigating the history of the term's use, the finer theological points it suggested, and perhaps its recent emergence in some forms of Hebrew Israelite religion. It is not, although Driscoll takes the NOI's myth of Yakub as a foundation, probing it, seeing how it fits in with more scholarly thought and what additional explanatory capacities it has. Driscoll does cover some of the finer points of NOI and NGE theology, but the text is not principally theological or historical. In fact it is better to frame the text in terms of its subtitle, which suggests that the book is really an investigation of white men, and white maleness *via the lens* of the White Devils trope.

Describing his text as "Blurring the line between ethnographic field study, theological polemic, and psychologist's couch" (p.7), Driscoll recounts much of his personal history: his childhood in Louisiana, his dysfunctional family and abuse by an older church member, leading to his disillusionment with white Christianity. He also discusses how he progressively resolved his traumas and found a deeper connection to himself and others – part of which was through hip hop, the gateway through which he discovered the new urban Black religious forms which helped him reimagine God and his own place in the world. Always informing Driscoll's analysis is his own history as an abuse survivor (and one-time perpetuator), which he plies to make sense of white maleness and the damage that white men have inflicted on other people. Particularly important is this recognition that European patriarchy – white male supremacy – is damaging not only to those it ostensibly oppresses; white men too are damaged by it. We are left emotionally incapable, obsessed with dominance, unable to accept our own weaknesses and resentful of any infringement on our supposed absolute rights, whether we successfully meet the expectations

placed upon us or not. All of this leads to an "abusive codependent reliance" on the very others we oppress.

Within the text much is interesting, and much is (fantastically) speculative; this is both a plus and a minus. Driscoll takes his own experiences of abuse within the white church as paradigmatic, indicative of a deeper rot which plagues the dominant class in an unequal society: the powerful must always find ways of excusing the crimes of their own, leading to an unresolvable cognitive dissonance. He muses at times as if to himself, presenting ideas that occur to him but which are impossible to confirm or deny. "White folks are good at disassociating our behavior from our identities, but [...] What if we learned this disassociation from our religious beliefs?" (p.54-5) he asks, part of a narrative he builds that "our" invisible/transparent/white God who persistently evades our investigations is representative of our own lack of self-knowledge. Another chapter provides an excellent and thought-provoking discussion of the idea of white rage and persecution complex, traceable back to the founding mythical narratives of western civilisation.



In another intriguing chapter he creates a link between Plato's Allegory of the Cave and the NOI belief that Europeans were distinguished by being cave-dwellers, suggesting that whites live our sheltered existence in fear of the reality of other, divergent perspectives. These are interesting ideas; they are well worth thinking about, and they challenge the usually rigid limits of scholarship on religion which presents itself as overwhelmingly scientific.

However, it also presents the problem of the book's audience: who exactly might read this book, and where does it stand in the literature? That is to say, to what and how does it contribute? While it certainly contains scholarship, and is very learned, I suspect it might fall into the gaps between the different fields it covers, finding very few who would read it all the way through. Which is regrettable, because it's certainly a book worth reading for anyone interested in race and religion.

Other than this, I have only two criticisms: the first is that the book accepts and promotes the outdated American typology of white and black. The world is more complex than this, and so is America. It is entirely unclear where other peoples fit into Driscoll's analysis, i.e. where he draws the colour line. The second is that he persistently misspells the Hebrew Name of God YHWH as YHWY.

Despite this, Driscoll's is an intriguing book, and one written with a flair of originality. The writing is fluid and easily-readable throughout. It is refreshing to read a white man taking the problems of whiteness and masculinity – and especially of white maleness – seriously. The present moment in America is one of intense anxiety: the nation is bitterly divided, the future uncertain, both violence and extremism are growing. One contributing factor is, I believe, white Christian anxiety regarding their imminent progression out of majority status; with this, they will no longer be able to dominate the surrounding cacophony of competing narratives and values. Driscoll's text subtly addresses this situation. Certainly, white America needs healing too, and white men need "Knowledge of Self" just as much as anyone else; in fact, Driscoll concludes, it is the absence of personal insight and emotional intelligence/regulation which may be at the root of the white man's historically devilish behaviour.

Michael T Miller
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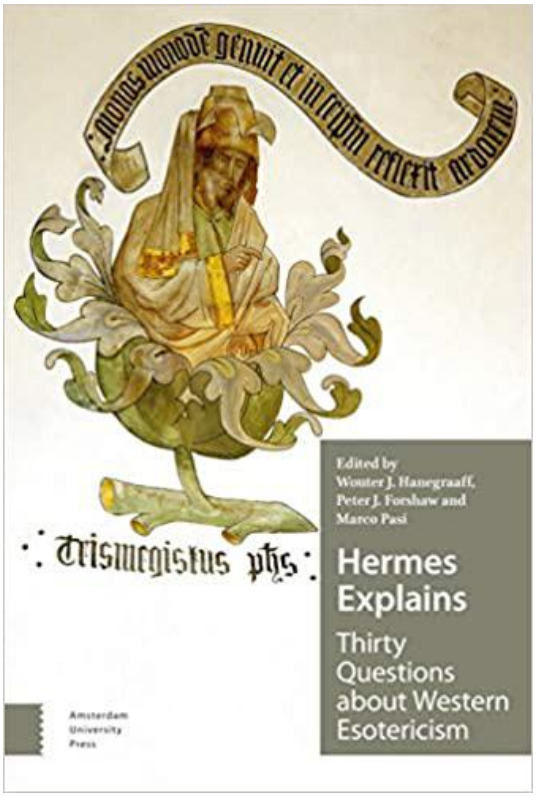
HANEGRAAFF, WOUTER J. ET AL (EDS). (2019) HERMES EXPLAINS: THIRTY QUESTIONS ABOUT WESTERN ESOTERICISM. AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS.

This wonderful volume was produced to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Centre for History

of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP) at the University of Amsterdam, and to coincide with the seventh conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), held in Amsterdam from 2-4 July, 2019. The book has thirty short chapters, each addressing a contentious issue in the study of Esotericism, which the editors' "Introduction" likens to the "red pills" of the Wachowskis' film *The Matrix* (1999). While there are stand-out chapters that ask crucial questions, it is worthwhile noting that chapters can be grouped under broad headings: for example, there are four chapters directly referencing Christianity; three that address sex and gender; six chapters on cultural production (heavy metal, superhero films, fiction and so on); a number that deal with the alleged irrationality or ignorance of holding occult beliefs; and four chapters on Judaism.

Egil Asprem's "Aren't we living in a disenchanted world?" reviews Max Weber's idea of the "disenchantment of the world" (p. 14) and investigates the mentalities and behaviours that such a transition would involve. While accepting that disenchantment contributes to the myth of modernity, Asprem shifts attention from considering it as a process and proposes that "it is a *problem* faced by modern subjects" (p. 18). From this viewpoint contemporary enchantments are clearly part of modernity rather than anti-modern. Tessel M. Bauduin's "Surely modern art is not occult? It is *modern*!" is an entertaining sketch of modern artists' engagement with spiritualism and occultism. The mediumistic aspects of art creation are noted and the necessity of integrating esoteric artists fully into a narrative of modernity sits close to Asprem's view of the conditions of modernity in general. Dylan Burns' "Weren't early Christians up against a Gnostic religion?" takes a deconstructive look at the Gnostics of the ancient world, focusing on George Robert Stowe Mead (1863-1933). Allison P. Coudert continues consideration of Blavatsky, among others, in "There's not much room for women in esotericism, right?" Her chapter surveys the prominent Spiritualist women and participants in co-masonry (which admitted females), and the role of Moina Mathers (née Mina Bergson) in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.



This reviewer is an admirer of Claire Fanger's scholarship, and her "Weren't medieval monks afraid of demons?" does not disappoint. Nine parts erudition and one part hilarity – due to the extraordinary details of accounts of demonic visions and persecution (toads in the bed of Ermine de Reims and John of Morigny spitting "in the face of the Virgin to make sure she was not a demon in disguise" [p. 90], are but two) – make this seemingly obscure subject matter one of the outstanding hits of the volume. Co-editor Forshaw tackles "Isn't alchemy a spiritual tradition?" with a broad suite of textual authorities from the Emerald Tablet through medieval Islamic and Christian authors, to a range of early modern writers (Robert Fludd and Jacob Boehme, for example) to modern "proponents of an alchemy of self-transmutation" (p. 111) Carl Gustav Jung and Marie Louise von Franz. "Isn't esotericism irrational?" by Olav Hammer asserts that rationality and irrationality are judged as modes of thinking in the context of the culture in which they operate, thus esotericism might not meet the standards of scientific thinking but does not merit dismissal on grounds of irrationality. Editor Hanegraaff's chapter, "Rejected knowledge … So you mean that esotericists are the losers of history?" is a swift walk through hegemonic discourses in Western history, and the varying status of esotericism and esotericists at certain crucial points along that timeline. He sees the rise of the study of

esotericism as intertwined with the postmodern "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Jean Francois Lyotard, quoted p. 149), but advocates an Enlightenment-type study based in empirical and historical study as the future of the field.

Boaz Huss ("The kind of stuff Madonna talks about – that's not real kabbala, is it?") and Massimo Introvigne ("Shouldn't evil cults that worship Satan be illegal?") venture into contemporary popular culture and new religious phenomena, respectively Philip and Karen Berg's Kabbalah Center, and the Satanic Temple in the United States of America. Mriganka Mukhopadhyay's "Isn't India the home of spiritual wisdom?" continues to mine this stream, from the Theosophical founders to contemporary backpackers, with some sharp critique regarding colonialism and Orientalism. Bernd-Christian Otto's "If people believe in magic, isn't that just because they aren't educated?" was another contribution that I read with considerable amusement and pleasure (it's so clear that the authors enjoy upending and inverting, and generally screwing with, the questions they've been set). More serious offerings include co-editor Pasi's "But what has esotericism to do with sex?" and Mark Sedgwick's "Is there such a thing as Islamic esotericism?" Thus far fourteen chapters have been noted and the whole collection is meritorious. This book is recommended in part because it is clever and reflexive and tilts at academic windmills, but is also open and plainly written and able to be enjoyed by undergraduates. That combination of accessibility and learnedness is rare and merits congratulations.

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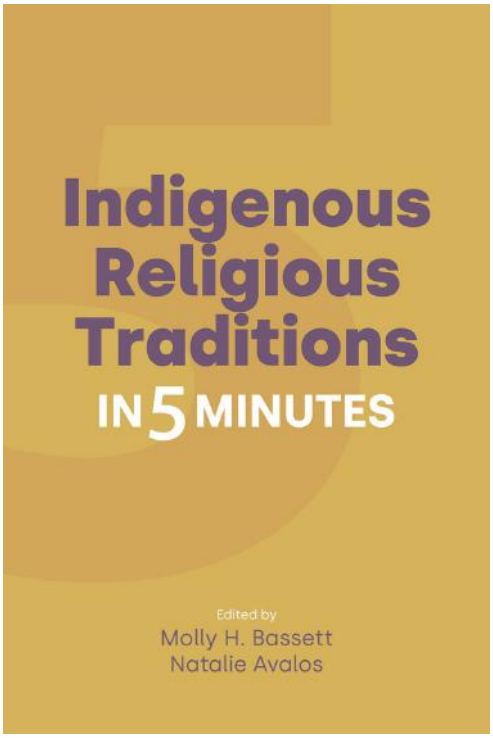
BASSETT, MOLLY H. AND AVALOS, NATALIE (EDS.). (2022) INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN FIVE MINUTES. EQUINOX.

In all honesty, I am a big fan of the "in Five Minutes" series by Equinox, I believe the concept behind is a winning one, and it manages to be extremely useful and user friendly to a wide audience which comprises students, researchers, and non specialistic audience. This element must be praised and acknowledged. *Indigenous Religious Tradition in Five Minutes*, as its predecessors, doesn't fail in offering a great quantity of information in a format easy to access, thanks to its structure and the writing style of this book

The book is organized in four sections for a total of 84 mini essays, these sections are: Indigeneity and Religion, The Study of Indigenous Religious Traditions, Indigenous Religious Tradition and Indigenous Futurity. This last area offers only one essay that acts as a kind of conclusion of the book.

The first part, Indigeneity and Religion, focuses on questions: what an Indigenous religion is, which problems the term "religion" brings, why study indigenous traditions and so on. I found this first section extremely interesting and useful, and I believe it manages to answer, in a simple but comprehensive way, to some questions that often students or young researchers can have.



The second part, The Study of Indigenous Religious Traditions, discusses cultural appropriation, decolonization, the use of term "shamanism" and so on. I consider this part, as the previous one, to be of great usefulness to a wide audience that are approaching these topics, sometimes for the first time.

Then, the third part, Indigenous Religious Tradition, offers some real life samples from different Indigenous cultures. This part, not less interesting than the others, is possibly more appealing to the more experienced researcher that is looking for a specific testimony more than a discussion of some general, yet very important, topic.

Moreover, the list of the names who participate to this book range from early-career research, such as Dr. Angela Puca, to well established names in the field, such as Professor Graham Harvey, just to name two among the many extremely talented minds who participated to this work. Moreover, we should praise the presence of many native researchers who took part in this project. In this way, this book manages to

offer a variety of point of views, experiences, and approaches to the reader.

The book is a fascinating read, but there is one issue that I must point out and it limits the exceptionality of the proposed work. This book, even if intends to present indigenous religious traditions, suffers from an extremely narrow geographical and cultural focus. Out of 84 essays that make up the book, 66 (78.5% of the book) of them focus on the American continent. More precisely, 49 mini essays, more than half of the book, discuss the North American reality, while only 17 essays focus on the Latin America, including Mexico. The remaining book is made of only 7 essays (5 of which on Voodoo) on Africa and the African diaspora, 1 on Europe, 3 on Asia (1 on Shinto and 2 on Adivasi) and, with my personal surprise, zero about Oceanian indigenous cultures. It felt to me quite an unbalanced offer, considering how much the Asian, Oceanian, and African indigenous communities could bring to the table when talking about Indigenous religious traditions and how this gap is pretty visible considering the amount of space available, 84 essays, and the general aim of this book. The result is an interesting and useful book nonetheless, but an unbalanced one.

In the end, I really enjoyed reading *Indigenous Religious Traditions in Five Minutes*, and it is a reading that I invite others to do, or even to use it for some module on religious traditions. Of course, it isn't a book to read in one go, but something to enjoy like a box of chocolates, one at a time. Therefore, I think it is a book that should be on the shelf on any student or early researcher working with Indigenous communities. Sadly, as pointed out before, the book is too (North) American centered, resulting in it being less interesting for scholars of other parts of the world, and students could be confused by the American-centered approach of this book to a global phenomenon. Maybe, in the future, we will see a second volume focusing more on the globality of the Indigenous reality.

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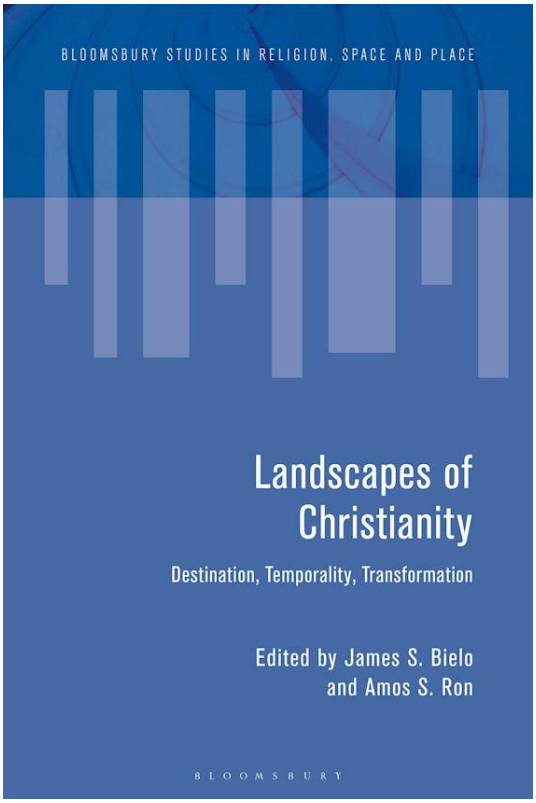
JAMES S. BIELO & AMOS S. RON (EDS.). (2022) LANDSCAPES OF CHRISTIANITY: DESTINATION, TEMPORALITY, TRANSFORMATION. BLOOMSBURY.



A focus on landscapes allows for recognition of the existence of different processes, structures, narratives, and dynamics taking place at the same time; landscapes are always an interaction between what is given and what is made, processes rather than static horizons of what is visible from any one viewpoint. So says Kim Knibbe in the foreword to this volume, which she hopes will inspire researchers to continue tracing how Christianity is enacted spatially and materially. Similarly, in their introduction, James S. Bielo and Amos S. Ron comment that Christianity is often seen as a scriptural religion but ask how our understanding might advance if we looked at it as a religion of land, and at Christians as producers, consumers, preservers, and occupiers of landscapes. I think perhaps that the latter question could be used as a kind of test for this book, so I will come back to it at the close of the review.

The book visits a wide set of Christian traditions and locations, making for a varied and always interesting read. It has three parts: Destinations, including case studies of how particular places have become sites of travel, devotion, and pedagogy; Temporalities, where the studies are of how communities connect land with time; and Transformations, on instances of Christians asserting and reframing relationships with

nature.

In part 1, Michael A. Di Giovine's chapter on the Padre Pio cult (he reports that the Italians and Irish pray more to Padre Pio than to Jesus, Mary, or St Francis) makes use of the idea of the galactic shrine in explaining the shift in power between pilgrimage sites over centuries. The global landscape of popular Catholicism is an overlapping system of sanctuaries with core power centres and satellites around them, the centre gaining significance or losing out to satellite(s). John Eade analyses the role of water in the development of Lourdes and the sacralisation of its landscape, even though the growth of the sanctuary was integrally linked to the secular expansion of the pilgrimage town; still, nature was to be tamed so that the shrine could be conventionally religious, rather than associated with the anciently-held healing properties of streams or springs. Brett Hendrickson brings out similar tensions in telling the story, or better, stories, of the Santuario de Chimayó in New Mexico. A side chapel of the santuario has a pocito (little well) through which miraculous healing dirt can be dug, and pilgrims rub it on themselves, take it home with them or sometimes even eat it. The origin accounts of the holy dirt entangle Spanish colonial Catholicism with indigenous Tewa cosmology. Sara M. Patterson looks at two Mormon captivity narratives, separated by a hundred years, showing how Mormons at first played the scary other then became an accepted religious minority; the genre has helped delineate the border of civilisation in a long American tradition.

In part 2, Jonathan Miles-Watson and Sitna Quiroz consider two sites of pilgrimage: Christchurch Cathedral in the Himalayas and Canaanland in Nigeria. The two landscapes draw from the relations that emerged through each place's colonial experiences; each is partly constituted by people who view it as distinct, but both owe an atmosphere of peace to the sense of difference and sacralise processes (such as economics) which are usually held to be profane. Joseph Webster reports fieldwork on Brethren fishermen in Scotland, and how they view themselves as occupying the end-times; reading, and fulfilling, prophecies in the context of the surrounding landscapes and seascapes. They attribute all human actions to God or the devil but constantly identify and enact eschatological signs. Rebekah King's chapter reflects on Shield of Faith, a non-denominational, charismatic church in rural Tennessee. The church is part of the Jewish Affinity Christianity movement, which brings Jewish practice and ideas into American evangelicalism. The community is gendered in a way reflective of traditional Southern family values, the presence of spiritual beings such as angels is noteworthy and so is Prosperity Gospel theology.

In part 3, James S. Bielo discusses materialisations of the Bible in the landscape, such as Holy Land USA in Connecticut, built in 1955 by a local Catholic lawyer who used throw-outs, concrete, statuary, lumber, tin, plastic, and other materials to recreate Bethlehem and Jerusalem in miniature. Over the world, there are over 450 such extant attractions, foci of devotion, teaching, entertainment, and evangelism. These are seen as expressive resources, building affective intimacy with scripture, but also part of the experience of the landscape shared by all. Veronica della Dora writes of open-air processions (*litaneies*) carried out by the monks of Mount Athos during major liturgical feasts. They relate to cycles of nature, in particular Bright Week celebrations, which bless the community, but also fields and crops, in an awakening of the landscape as well as a spiritual and emotional rebirth: in these and other ways della Dora recounts, such as the transportation of relics, the monastery is taken out of the monastery. Amos S. Ron describes sacred groves in the Holy Land, the Mount of Beatitudes, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Garden Tomb. The concepts locational authenticity (whether the event commemorated took place there) and visual authenticity (to what extent it looks the same as then) are used in analysis. The Garden of Gethsemane has exceptionally strong authenticity through both types. Still, sacred places are ordinary places, sanctified by people through tradition, prayer, understanding and ritual.

Simon Coleman's Afterword rehearses the same point, noting how the landscape focus is a reminder of the social, spiritual, and material grounding of religious life. Spaces can mediate between realms (such as the everyday and transcendent), or be domesticated to religious authority, appropriated by Christianity, or temporalised (whether cyclically or as expressions of the end-times). Overall, Christian landscape contains the tensions and energies needed for its own displacement and replacement.

It might be reflected that one or two of the chapters relate less closely to matters of the material landscape than do the majority, but this is a minor point given the close fascination and richness of the collection. For me, the interpretive device of land and the anthropology of producers, consumers, preservers, and occupiers of landscapes do offer

advances of understanding; the different examples in the collection led me to reflect on these more than I had done before (I recognise their force because of serial exposure to Andalucian processions and myths), and whilst sure that the landscape concept could be productive in my own specialist field, school-level education of religion and worldviews, I would need to look further with teachers at within-curriculum practicalities. Engaging young people in localised, fine-grained, multi-perspectival study would probably be the guiding aim. For now, I recommend this book warmly, having enjoyed it greatly.

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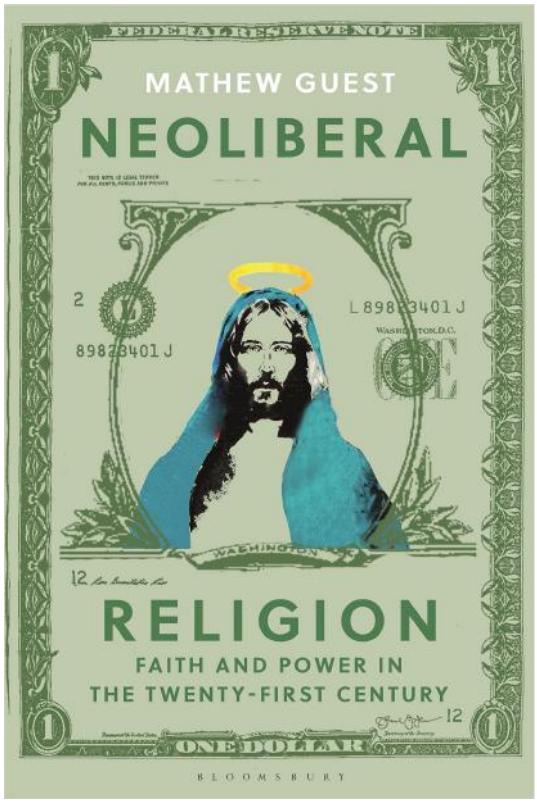
GUEST, M. (2022). NEOLIBERAL RELIGION: FAITH AND POWER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. BLOOMSBURY.



The opening chapter provides readers with a strong foundation and introduction of the relationship between religion and neoliberalism. The book is explicit in refraining from adopting a specific theoretical standpoint but ensures 'a critical distance from theoretical models that have dominated the sociology of religion'. It is clear that the edition is making a marked change in analysis from previous theoretical understandings, namely secularisation. The secularisation thesis has largely been refuted within the field which for Guest is in part due to the impact of neo-liberalism. The chapter unpicks various elements of neo-liberalism and charts the relationship from its early conception from Weber (1904) to more contemporary notions provided by those such as Terry Flew (2015) who advocate a critical cultural approach. The opening chapter successfully outlines an alternative approach which also highlights that although individuals are freer to choose their faith identity there is still a social element. The book's key assertation is situated within this approach which is chiefly concerned with the ways in which economic forces are situated within contemporary religion. The following chapters are centred around five themes which are symptomatic of neo-liberalism.

Throughout the book Guest traces how the neo-liberal market strategies have been adopted by religions. Guest draws from a range of examples to demonstrate the influence of these strategies, for example, The Saddleback Church as an example of US megachurches or the range of evangelical courses offering merchandise which are 'subject to careful marketing, packaging, advertising and promotion'. A careful consideration is made to ensure examples are provided from a non-Christian perspective. Guest makes use of François Gauthier's (2018) analysis of Islam's religious revival within the middle east to consumer capitalism alongside Mira Niculescu's (2013) investigation of Judaism's attempt to appeal to younger generations through the use of new media outlets.

In the second chapter, Guest refers to one of neo-liberalism's recent political indicators, populism. Guest makes a nuanced link between the two forces attributing the connection to a shared 'unifying identity, cutting across ethnic, class-based and sectarian boundaries to convey an illusory sense of a united, homogenous population'. Guest makes use of a range of examples to illustrate the complex relationship between religion and populism which is undoubtedly culturally bound. For example, Guest refers to the influence of the Christian Evangelicals demographic which provided overwhelming support for Donald Trump's 2016

election victory which demonstrates how religion and populism have a supportive relationship. Comparatively, the relationship between secular and religious spheres is not as symbiotic when considering the context in France. Both in cultural attitudes and legislation religion is encouraged to be confined to the private sphere and therefore has no place in French identity. In turn, this advocation of the privatisation of religion is a point of contention with France's Muslim population leading to hostility and a call from the populist far right for a 'de-Islamization' of France. We therefore see here two contrasting examples of the complexity of neoliberal politics and its correlation with religion.

Guest continues to make detailed analysis of the contemporary examples situated within the neoliberal age. For example, the discussion regarding post-truth within chapter four provides expert analysis regarding the current political and religious climate concerning the democratisation of knowledge. The development of technology in an increasingly globalised world has enabled religious pluralism to flourish due to ease of spreadable information across the religious and spiritual spectrum. Guest succinctly weaves changes in political discourse, namely populist politics, with changes in religious participation and affiliation. Guest argues that claims to truth which may have previously been rejected now have the ability to gain traction in the online realm and in turn support which contributes to the development of populist movements indicative of neo-liberalism. Consequently, the post-truth turn not only democratises information but also allows, as Guest writes, for dissenting voices to be marginalised and in the case of social media and its algorithmic structure, not heard at all. Guest maps out what impact this has on religion turning to examples such as The Plymouth Brethren, Ultra-Orthodox Judaism or The Mennonite Amish community to demonstrate ways in which these systems have had to adjust to the changes ushered in by neo-liberalism. In doing so, the edition provides a rich analysis of the ways in which both well-established religions, together with the more recent growth of a spiritual milieu, have been affected with the latter being a point of focus in previous literature.

One of the key strengths of the book is the acknowledgement by Guest to an under-researched area in religious studies which is non-religion. Rather than seeing secularism as simply the absence of religion, as has been suggested by previous literature, Guest's chapter on secularism and neo-liberalism provides an elaborate examination of the relational approach that current scholarship advocates. Once again, Guest makes use of relevant and contemporary examples citing French, Austrian and Denmark's legislative change; banning religious dress to uphold the 'secularity of the French Republic'. Moreover, Guest's chapter adopts this viewpoint to discuss the interconnected ways in which religion and spirituality must navigate and accommodate a demography of increasingly secular states. Additionally, analysis must also acknowledge the position of secularity is not neutral but 'emerges shaped by the social context in which it is found'. It is important to note that Guest takes heed of his initial warning that examination must not simply attribute the current religious landscape down to pick and mix postmodernism but enquiry must go beyond this undeveloped examination.

The book makes a useful and generative departure from previous literature that overly states the individualistic nature of religion within a neo-liberal age. The advent of deregulation does not necessarily mean 'an unstructured and unfettered religious free for all' and so the book adds to current scholarship on neo-liberalism and religion which extends beyond previous theories such as secularisation and individualism. The adoption of a cultural critical approach further adds nuance to Guest's analysis, further emphasising the role that social context plays. In doing so, the book is inter-disciplinary in its investigation drawing from a range of academic fields such as sociology, political science and economics.

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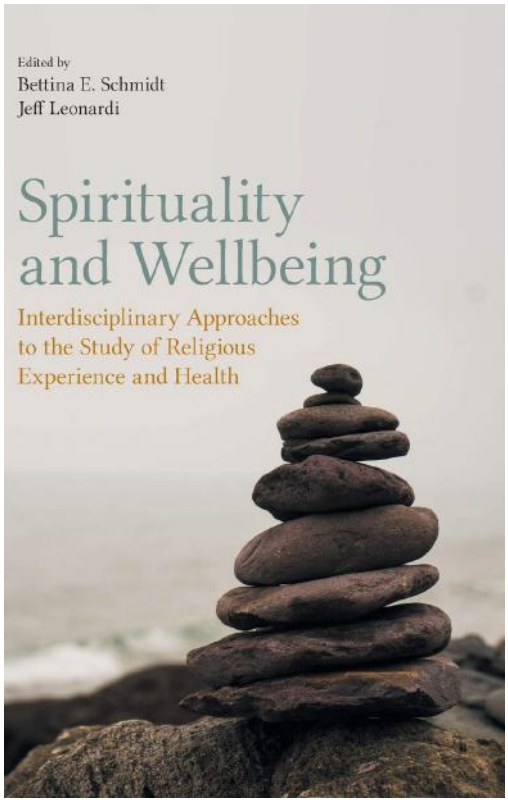
SCHMIDT, B. & LEONARDI, J. (EDS.). 2020. SPIRITUALITY AND WELLBEING: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND HEALTH. EQUINOX.

Given the widespread prevalence of 'spirituality', Schmidt and Leonardi's edited volume is a welcome contribution to the religion/spirituality and wellbeing literature. Whilst many studies in this area are quantitative in nature, often hailing from North America, this volume details qualitative explorations of spirituality and wellbeing that are more global in scope, offering insights from studies across three

continents (Europe, Asia and South America). This provides a more panoramic perspective of how the relationship between spirituality and wellbeing manifests beyond the culturally specific.

There are ten chapters (plus an introduction) divided into four sections: Setting the Scene (Chapters 1-2); The Body in Focus (Chapters 3-5); The Diversity of Perspectives (Chapters 6-8); and Applied Practice (Chapters 9-10). Chapter 1 is entitled 'Spirituality and Wellbeing: Is There a Necessary Link? Toward a Critical Approach to Study of Spirituality' (by de Oliveira Maraldi). It offers methodological discussion of whether there is a link between 'spirituality' and 'wellbeing' before unpacking the meaning of the former. The author provides balanced discussion by introducing the negative impact that some forms of spiritual practices can have on individuals, before reflecting on how the study of spirituality can be appropriately critical. Consequently, the term 'individuation' is preferred to 'wellbeing' as it concerns the strengthening of one's identity whilst some forms of spirituality facilitate the reduction of the self-concept.

Chapter 2 ('Clinical Parapsychology: The Interface Between Anomalous Experiences and Psychological Wellbeing') is by Roe. Paranormal experiences are under-discussed in public discourse, under-researched in academia, and yet widely documented across time and space. As Roe notes, such experiences often challenge the materialistic outlook many have of the world and have implications for psychological wellbeing. Placing this chapter as a scene setter usefully reminds one just how broad a research area the intersection of spirituality and wellbeing is.



Chapter 3 ('Made in the Image: The Christian Understanding of the Body') is by Leonardi. It summarises some Christian attitudes towards the body and the way this shapes a holistic (i.e., "physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual" (p.77)) conception of wellbeing. Leonardi reconciles an often ambivalent Christian understanding of the body and insights from the psychological wellbeing literature. The reflection of the incarnation and of God's creation of the physical world is the justification for the Christian to view the body positively. This chapter bridges between the study of religion and of spirituality at their interface with wellbeing.

Chapter 4 ('Spirituality and Wellbeing in Traditional China: Food, Self-Sacrifice, and Spiritual Practice in a Chinese Buddhist Legend') is by Jansen. Part of its unique contribution is the analysis of the Chinese Buddhist legend Miaoshan as a window into understanding spirituality and wellbeing. In doing so, this chapter highlights how manifestations of both spirituality and wellbeing can be culturally specific. Beyond the culturally specific, however, is Jansen's argument that wellbeing can thus be viewed as "a fluid *process of becoming*" where the meaning of wellbeing is constantly negotiated in light of "personal, inter-personal or societal perspectives" (p. 109, italics original).

Chapter 5 (by Dossett) is '*Spiritus contra spiritum*: Spirituality, Belief and Discipline in Alcoholics Anonymous'. Dossett unpacks the meanings of 'religion', 'spirituality' and 'secular' as she examines the narratives of those on the Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Steps programme. The study of these concepts as discursive phenomena enables a nuanced examination of how individuals navigate wellbeing alongside their religious/spiritual identity, whilst mitigating the risk of imposing belief systems on participants. This depth is furthered by Dossett's connections between participants' beliefs/practices and those of Ignatian spirituality.

In 'Narratives of Spirituality and Wellbeing: Cultural Differences and Similarities between Brazil and the UK' (Chapter 6), Schmidt understands wellbeing as a

relational "Living well" (p. 138). She highlights the importance of local context in shaping how the relationship between religion/spirituality and medicine is perceived, focusing on medical professionals and religious/spiritual practitioners in Brazil and the UK. Given this is qualitative research, the number of participants in the second phase of the study is impressive (over 200 individuals) and the reflexive honesty built into this chapter is indicative of a robust methodological process.

Spiers wrote Chapter 7 ('Using Autoethnography to Explore the Experience of Spirituality in Epilepsy'). Engaging with phenomenological literature in combination with first-hand experience facilitates a less reductive analysis on spirituality and epilepsy than is often provided in wellbeing studies. Spiers fairly discusses possible limitations but, combined with its resistance to purely reductive analysis, the autoethnography allows for a unique and detailed contribution not afforded in the same way via other methods.

In 'To Thine Own Self Be True: Alcoholics Anonymous, Recovery and Care of the Self' (Chapter 8), Rodríguez-Morales explores how the concept of transcendence shapes the meaning-making experience of AA members. It too does so from a phenomenological perspective and introduces the notion of a 'secular' spirituality. Whilst adjectives such as 'secular' are problematic, this way of discussing spirituality highlights its ability to remain present in contexts where formal religion has declined.

de Freitas authored the penultimate chapter—'Religiosity, Spirituality and Wellbeing in the Perception of Brazilian Health and Mental Health Professionals'. By discussing how medical professionals in Brazil view religion/spirituality, this chapter offers an appropriate complement to Schmidt's, offering a fuller picture than each chapter individually could. The final chapter, by Seale, is entitled 'Compassionate Presence: Buddhist Practice and the Person-Centred Approach to Counselling and Psychotherapy'. This chapter in usefully makes links between Buddhist practices and person-centred therapy. In so doing, the link between spirituality and wellbeing is at one of its most pronounced in the book.

The overall structure of the book ensures that background, physicality, divergent perspectives and practical implications are all discussed. Notwithstanding, each chapter explores different facets of wellbeing and spirituality. Whilst the introduction helpfully offers broad definitions of both, explicit reflection on how these terms were being operationalised throughout, accompanied by methodological reflections of relevance for the wider wellbeing literature, would be welcome. Connections between some chapters would also add to the discussion. Chapter 1's concern of the reduction of the self-concept could inform the discussion of person-centred therapy discussed in Chapter 6. Similarly, discussion on why Chapters 6 and 9 yielded different results on medical professionals' view of religion/spirituality could lead to interesting methodological discussion and possibly even offer data triangulation.

Finally, it would have been useful for the literature on phenomenology to be further unpacked and expanded via data analysis, particularly as this approach has much potential to shed light on lived experiences of spirituality at a time when the spirituality-wellbeing relationship is considered salient. Nevertheless, given the impressive ground covered by the book, these comments are offered as an encouragement for further research that is rooted in the findings of this volume.

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CUSACK, CAROLE M. AND UPAL, MUHAMMAD AFZAL (EDS). (2021). HANDBOOK OF ISLAMIC SECTS AND MOVEMENTS BRILL HANDBOOKS ON CONTEMPORARY RELIGION. BRILL.

This substantial volume contains 33 chapters. Contributors include some well-known names as well as some less familiar ones. A brief introductory chapter explains that its aim is to help readers to 'grasp the full extent of the diverse thought that exists under the name of Islam' (p.2). It is divided into five sections – Sunni Traditions, Shi'a Traditions, Fundamentalisms and Extremists, Sufism and Its Influences, and In Between and on the Fringes of Islam, and each section has a brief introduction.

The first chapter is a very useful review by Ron Geaves of the history of sectarianism in Sunni Islam, in which he points out that there are difficulties in applying Weberian-influenced approaches, deriving from efforts to understand divisions within Christianity, to Islamic 'sectarianness'. The most serious schisms amongst Sunni Muslims, he suggests, have tended to develop around

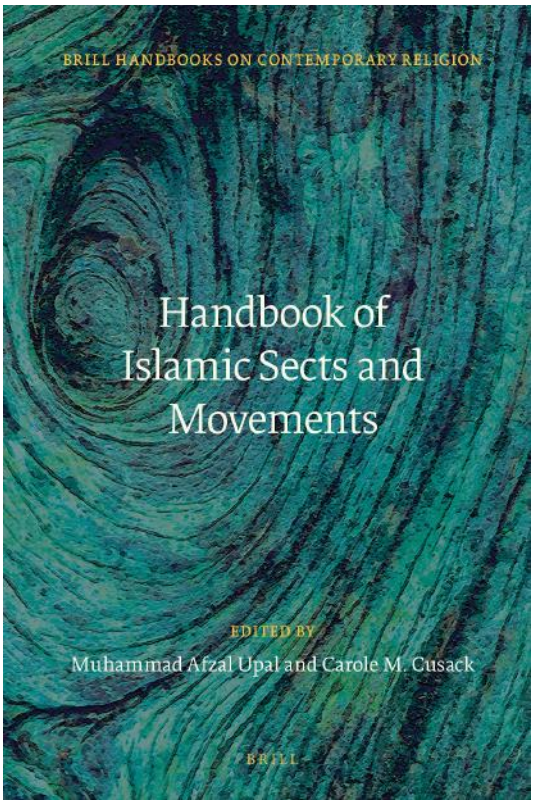
disagreements over governance and the nature of the caliphate and the question of whether it was a political office or a religious one or both. The three chapters that follow narrow the focus to concentrate on examples of Sunni movements which developed in reaction to European imperialism and modernizing pressures, the Tablighi Jama'at, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Gülen movement.

Focusing on Indonesia Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the influential Nahdlatul Ulama, described as 'the largest independent Islamic organisation across the globe' (p.129), and Islam Nusantara (meaning 'Islam of the Indonesian archipelago'). The latter is an inclusive 'religious orientation' (p.111), one which the Nahdlatul Ulama, among others, continues to promote. The final chapter reviews the role and status of women in Islamic tradition, drawing attention to the diversity of women's views today, with some supporting gender hierarchy and others doing what they can to fight against it.

The chapters in Part 2 of the book engage with key developments in the histories of several Shi'a or Shi'a-related communities, Zaydis, Nizari and Bohra Ismailis, Alevis and Alawis, as well as identifying their distinctive features and their responses to secularising pressures. Contemporary Iran is the focus of a case study looking at the role of charismatic *maddahan*, recitors or eulogists, who deliver emotive accounts of the sufferings and martyrdoms of Imam Husayn and other members of the Prophet Muhammad's family to groups (*hey'ats*) which meet to commemorate events in the Imami Shi 'a calendar. In recent years with government support the *hey'ats* have grown in number and the chapter explores the development by some *maddahan* of a new recitation style which has encouraged the emergence of 'a popular youth culture based on aesthetics and emotion' (p.325) which is challenging the authority of the *ulama*.

Part 3 Fundamentalism and Extremism begins with an informative chapter by Joas Wagemakers which focuses on Salafism (a movement aspiring to return to what Salafis regard as the true Islam of the first three generations of Muslims), and looks at its attitudes to engagement with the wider world, ranging from quietism through peaceful political activity to 'jihadi-Salafist' militancy.

Discussions of the emergence and development of the Afghan Taliban and Hamas in Chapters 15 and 16 are followed by a chapter focusing on Hizb-ut-Tahir. This movement, founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (1909-1977) (all dates CE), has continued to focus on activities aimed at recreating the caliphate. Unlike ISIS however whose leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (1971-2019) audaciously proclaimed himself caliph in 2014, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has never actually put forward a candidate for the office; nor has it been involved in violence. Useful accounts of the development of the Nigerian Boko Haram and the Lebanese Hezbollah movement follow. Chapter 20 looks briefly at four organisations often referred to in the Russian media as sects, before focusing on a fifth, the Faizrakhmanisty, a small group of followers of Faizrakhman (b.1929), an Islamic scholar who founded a community in the Russian city of Kazan in 1996. With little or no justification, the author argues, the authorities characterised it as an extremist sect, and gradually closed it down in 2014. This section concludes with a survey of militant takfirism (Muslims denouncing other Muslims whose behaviour they find unacceptable as apostates deserving the death penalty), reviewing the development of the *takfiri* tendency in classical Islam and discussing its growing political importance in the second half of the 20th century, culminating in



ISIS' malign combination of takfirism, violence, and End Times prophecy.

Part 4 begins with a general chapter which after reviewing Sufism's origins in the 8th and 9th centuries focuses on developments since the 17th century, and the emergence of new Sufi orders which have been, it argues, more stable, centralised, cohesive and sober than their predecessors. It emphasizes that Sufi groups continue to thrive and make converts and that a Sufi ethos has been absorbed into organisations of different kinds including trades unions and political coalitions and parties. This is followed by another case study, of the modern Imami 'Khaniqahi' Ni'matullahi Sufi order, founded by the émigré Iranian psychiatrist Javad Nurbakhshah (1926-2008), which he envisaged as a 'progressive spirituality' (p.556) open to non-Muslims. The next chapter returns to Indonesian Islam and discusses the Subud movement, 'an Indonesian interpretation of Sufism' (p.586) founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901-1987) and influenced by Hindu-Javanese systems of thought as well as a Javanese interpretation of Islamic mysticism. The penultimate chapter in this section covers the contribution the French convert to Islam, René Guénon (1886-1951) and his follower, Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), made to the spread of Sufism and Sufi influences in the West. The final chapter addresses the question of how far 'the Work', the system developed by the esoteric spiritual teacher, George Gurdjieff (d. 1949), was based on Sufism, concluding that he was not a Sufi and did not teach Sufism.

The last section, Part 5, focuses on movements 'In between and on the Fringes of Islam'. The first chapter introduces the rationalism of the Indian reformer, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and investigates possible links between his ideas and those of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908). Three chapters explore what Susan Palmer calls the Black 'cultic milieu' (p.694) in the USA, dealing in particular with the Nation of Islam, founded by W.D. Fard Muhammad (1893-?) in Detroit in 1930, the Moorish Science Temple of America, set up by Noble Drew Ali (1886-1929) and the Ansaaru Allah community, which flourished in Brooklyn from 1972 to 1992. The latter's founder, Dwight D. York (b. 1945), is a particularly controversial figure currently serving a very long prison sentence for child molestation and financial conduct (crimes his enemies invented to discredit him, his supporters argue). The book concludes with historical surveys of three very different communities, two of them, the Druzes and the Yezidis, more than a thousand years old and the third, the Bahais, emerging since the earlier 19th century.

This is a rewarding collection of wide-ranging surveys and detailed case studies. That said, it might have been helpful to have had a more systematic discussion of some of the key terms, in particular sect, denomination, movement, fundamentalism and extremism, and their application in the Islamic context. For instance we are told in the introduction on p.2 that 'Sects are groups of individuals who share a set of beliefs'. That may be the case, but many of the chapters highlight the extent to which these Islamic 'sects' are actually communities which continue to exist while their beliefs change. A different issue is the repetition in different chapters of the same background information about, for example, the origins of the Sunni-Shi'a division, the life and the contribution of the influential member of the Muslim Brotherhood and Qur'an commentator, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), and the important hadith about how Islam will have 73 sects of which only one will survive. There is the occasional slip, such as the claim that the Palestinian, Abdullah Azzam, was the founder of Al-Qa'ida (p.388), and a reference to *mujahid* (a Muslim who engages in jihad) rather than *mujaddid* (renewer) on p.44. Nevertheless the wealth of well-informed discussion makes it a valuable reference work. It can be recommended without hesitation to anyone wishing to learn more about historical and contemporary diversity within and on the borders of Islamic tradition.

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URBAN, HUGH B. (2021). SECRECY: SILENCE, POWER, AND RELIGION. UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS.

Hugh Urban's article "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions" (1998) was significant because it tackled issues that went to the core of not only the study of esotericism but also of religion in general. The shifting patterns of knowledge and access that researchers who are outside religions/groups, researchers who are inside, informants and commentators who are members, and those who are ex-members possess speak to recurring issues (the

"insider/ outsider" problem, the relationship of secular religious studies to theology, and the value of taking a broadly phenomenological approach and treating the research area as a *ding an sicht* versus the deconstructive approach that seeks either to move sideways from "religion" to some less charged term, or to abandon "religion" entirely) that Religious Studies scholars struggle with. *Secrecy: Silence, Power, and Religion* is a short book that nevertheless packs a punch; it has an "Introduction" and "Conclusion" and five substantive chapters.

Guy Debord and Sissela Bok are the two thinkers referenced at the start of the book; this reviewer admires them both intensely and was won over at that point. Urban probes present conditions; terrorism, surveillance, and the Trump presidency. He asserts that secrecy is closer to religion than to politics, and wants to "theorize secrecy as a broader, cross-cultural, and comparative phenomenon in the history of religions" (p. 3), a task to date neglected. His focus is religious secrecy from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, using an approach in the mode of Bruce Lincoln. The idea that disenchantment and transparency dually overwhelmed enchantment and secrecy is challenged, and the post 9/11 rise of secrecy and surveillance is surveyed. The ideas of secrecy as adornment, secrecy as exchange commodity, and secrecy as weapon are briefly explained. Chapter 1, "The Adornment of Silence," considers Scottish Rite Freemasonry in the post-Civil War context. The contrast of Freemasonry's advertisement of itself as egalitarian, and the hierarchical degree system once inside the system is highlighted and there is a fascinating discussion of the complex regalia that the Scottish Rite developed.

Chapter 2, "The Secret Doctrine," probes Madame Blavatsky as the archetypal occultist, and her Himalayan "Mahatmas" as the quintessential hidden fraternity, whose wisdom was being revealed in modernity. Urban. Discusses the conflict between Blavatsky and Emma and Alex Coulomb, who "denounced HPB as a fraud and the Masters' letters as the product of her own hand" (p. 67). What Urban calls the "marketplace of secrets" is used as a lens to analyse the Esoteric Section of Theosophy and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Chapter 3, "The Seduction of the Secret," shifts attention to sexuality and the little-known Marie de Naglowska (1883-1936), the Russian-born probable lover of Julius Evola and vigorous participant in the artistic, esoteric, and intellectual life of Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. Chapter 4, "Secrecy and Social Resistance," tackles yet another zone of secrecy and esotericism, race in America and the "subversive bricolage" of the Five Percenters (p. 103). This chapter looks at the connections between the music genre of hip hop, the Wu Tang Clan, and the historical journey from the Masons to the Moorish Science Temple, the Nation of Islam, to the Five Percenters' desire to transform and subvert "the *basic system of signs itself*" (p. 121). The sex and gender dynamics of the Five Percenters (men as Gods and women as Earths) are critiqued and the group's identity as "a powerful example of the role of secrecy as a form of social resistance" (p. 133) is demonstrated.

Chapter 5, "The Terror of Secrecy," shifts attention to the Brüder Schweigen (Silent Brotherhood), a White supremacist group, the thought of William Luther Pierce III (1933-2002), and the influence of his pseudonymously authored novel *The Turner Diaries* (1975-1978). After a terrorist career in the 1980s, including the murder of Jewish talk show Alan Berg (1934-1984), the Order was rounded up by 1987. Urban chronicles the racist Paganism of David Lane and Wotansvolk as a continuation of the Brüder Schweigen, and concludes with a discussion of the contemporary Alt-Right, White nationalism, and

Trump. Chapter 6, "The Third Wall of Fire," is on the Church of Scientology, about which Urban has written a monograph. The focus here is Operating Thetan VIII, apparently the highest esoteric level instantiated by L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986). Urban's discussion is about the construction and maintenance of the secret via a history of Scientology; Hubbard's occult interests, the development of Dianetics, the late 1960s context of the OT Levels, and the Fishman case of 1990, which placed the OT materials in the public domain. In OT VIII Hubbard claims to be Metteya (Maitreya), and downgrades the mission of Jesus, and the Christian expectations of the Second Coming. Urban emphasises the embarrassment, litigation, and liability that the protection of such secrets entails.

The "Conclusion" argues for a stronger understanding of secrecy as being at the nexus of knowledge and power, and being central to the whole of human existence, not merely some aspects. Urban notes that "concealment and unknowing are as critical to religion as are knowing or revelation" (p. 189), an obvious statement that this reviewer does not recall ever reading previously. State, religious, and corporate entities are located in webs of surveillance, terrorism, secrecy, and disinformation. Urba revisits 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, the online realm, and the erosion of personal privacy as state secrecy grows at an unprecedented rate. *Secrecy: Silence, Power, and Religion* is very readable, has at times a thriller-like pace, and raises important questions for twenty-first century scholars of religion, politics, and all the human and social sciences. It is highly recommended.

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Members' Recent Publications

Gwilym Beckerlegge

2023 'Man-making, Nation-building, and National Reconstruction: The Engaged Hinduism of the RSS and the Vivekananda Kendra' in *Journal of Dharma Studies*.

'A religion "based upon principles, and not upon persons": the heart of the "strategic fit" of Swami Vivekananda's promotion of Vedānta?' in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 27.1.

2022 'Celebrating heritage, promoting tourism, and relocating Svāmī Vivekānanda: a study of the Svāmī Vivekānanda Rock Memorial' in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 25.2.

2021 'The Making of the Ideal Transnational Disciple: Unravelling Biographies of Margaret Noble/Sister Niveditā' In P Bornet (ed.) *Translocal Lives and Religion: Connections between Asia and Europe in the Late Modern World* (The Study of Religion in a Global Context series). Sheffield: Equinox, pp. 57- 88.

2020 'The Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Europe' in K Jacobsen and F Sardella (eds.) *Handbook of Hinduism in Europe (2 Vols) (Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 2 South Asia)*. Leiden: Brill, pp.422-461.

Marion Bowman

2022 'Negotiating Vernacular Authority, Legitimacy and Power: Creativity, Ambiguity and Materiality in Devotion to Gauchito Gil' in Ülo Valk U and Marion Bowman, eds, *Contesting Authority: Vernacular Knowledge and Alternative Beliefs*. Sheffield & Oakville CT: Equinox, pp. 284-308.

'Afterword: 25 years of Vernacular Religion scholarship' in Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman, eds, *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*. Sheffield & Oakville CT: Equinox, pp.405-18.

'Folk Religion' in George D. Chryssides and Amy Whitehead, eds, *Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion: A Critical Exploration*. London, New York, Dublin: Bloomsbury Academic, pp 39-43.

'Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spiritualities. Tribute to Leonard Norman Primiano (1957-2021)'. *Traditiones* 50(3):7–14 (2022).

with Simon Coleman. *Religion in Cathedrals: Pilgrimage, Place, Heritage, and the Politics of Replication*. Routledge. (Book version of themed issue Religion 49.1, 2020, in response to popularity of that issue).

Ann Gillian Chu

2023 'Stanley Hauerwas and "Chan Tai-man": an Analysis of Hong Kong Laypeople's Lived Theology and Hong Kong Theologians' Engagement with Stanley Hauerwas's Political Theology from a Practical Theology Perspective'. *Practical Theology*. 1.15.

with John Perry: '"If the Gospel We Preach Disregards Human Rights, I Would Rather not Preach This Gospel": Towards a Lived Theology of Hong Kong Churches'. *Theology Today* 79.4. pp. 422–434.

Nicole Graham

2022 'Opponent or Advocate?: Exploring Clement of Alexandria's Attitude(s) Towards Laughter', in Roald Dijiska & Paul van der Velde (eds.), *Humour in the Beginning: Cultural Interaction of Laughter and the Comic in the First Phase of Asian religions, Christianity and Islam*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 47-62.

2020 'Laughing with "Horrible" People: Reaffirming Ethical Boundaries Through Laughter' in Steven A. Benko (ed.), *Ethics in Comedy: Essays on Crossing the Line*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, pp. 210-222.

Michael T Miller

2023 "Layers of Liminality and Marginality in the African Hebrew Israelite Community" in *Betwixt and Between Liminality and Marginality: Mind the Gap*. Zohar Hadromi-Allouche & Michael Hubbard MacKay (eds.), Lexington, pp.15-36.

"African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem" in *World Religions and Spiritualities Project* ed. David G. Bromley. https://wrldrels.org/

Steven J. Sutcliffe

2022 'Uusia näkökulmia etsijyyteen: Kuinka selittää liikettä sisään ja ulos uusista uskonnoista?' in Tiina Mahlamäki and Minna Opas (eds.), *Uushenkisyys* [New Spirituality, pp. 51-74 (Translation into Finnish of 'Seekership revisited: Explaining Traffic In and Out of New Religions' (2017) with a new afterword in Finnish).

''Seeking' as a Late Modern Tradition: Three Vernacular Biographies', in Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman (eds.), *Vernacular Knowledge: Contesting Authority, Expressing Beliefs*, pp. 214-236 Sheffield: Equinox, pp. 214-236.

'Spirituality'. Chapter 19, in George Chryssides and Amy Whitehouse (eds.), *Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion: A Critical Exploration*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 117-121.

obituaries

Frank Whaling

5 February 1934 – 26 October 2022

Professor Frank Whaling, who was appointed to the staff of New College in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh in 1973 to coordinate the new BA and MA (Honours) degrees in Religious Studies, died on 26th November 2022. He retired in 1999, but maintained a keen interest in the activities of Edinburgh's Religious Studies Subject Area and more widely continued an ambitious record of research and publishing. The first decade of Religious Studies at Edinburgh began slowly with just eight new students enrolling in the 1981-82 academic year. The 1980s, however, saw a rapid growth in undergraduate students entering the degree programme and an even higher number of students from outside Divinity attending first and second year classes in religion. By 1988, Frank reported that over 50 students were regularly attending the first-year survey of religion class; by 1993, it had jumped to 120. In 1996, 40 students accepted a place on the Religious Studies course, most pursuing the MA (Hons) degree. So dramatic had interest in Religious Studies at Edinburgh grown that, Frank claimed, 'Edinburgh had the widest course in Religious Studies in the United Kingdom' (Whaling 1996: 162). He described the composition of students as varied culturally and religiously:

> A small but continuing number of students were Jews, Muslims and Buddhists who offered to the New College community contact with people outside the Christian tradition. Others had an academic and often existential interest in religion that was not necessarily linked to an identifiable institution (Whaling 1996: 158).

Frank Whaling's approach to the study of religion was influenced strongly by his study at Harvard University under the Canadian scholar of comparative religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), where he earned a Doctorate of Theology in 1971. Frank acknowledged his debt to Smith in his introductory chapter to a book he edited in Smith's honour, *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies*, where he described Smith as a scholar who possessed an

'academic and humane vision of the truth' which he pursued 'with the utmost scholarly rigour and personal integrity' (Whaling 1984c: 5). This same attitude can be attributed to Frank Whaling, whose influence on the development of Religious Studies as a field in its own right is substantial. His contribution can be summarised in a number of significant ways.

Initially, it is important to note that Frank anticipated the critique of what is now called the 'World Religions Paradigm', which historically limited (and continues to limit) the study of religion/s to reified, self-contained, non-contextualised entities defined in terms generally consistent with Christian theological categories (see the critiques by Owen 2011 and Cotter and Robertson 2016, all Edinburgh alumni). Frank argued that Religious Studies should not be confined to the study of the so-called 'major religious traditions' but should include 'primal religions, archaic religions, and world-views such as Marxism' (Whaling 1984c: 22). This implicitly 'world-view' modelling of the teaching of 'religion', previously a lynchpin in the Religious Studies programme developed by Ninian Smart (1927-2001) at Lancaster from 1967, is now again being debated (Taves 2020, Davies 2022). In this light, Frank's double solo edited volume, *Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion: Vol 1, The Humanities; Vol 2, The Social Sciences* (Whaling 1984-5), looks remarkably prescient, including as it does Frank's substantial chapters 'Comparative Approaches' (Whaling 1984a) and 'The Study of Religion in a Global Context' (Whaling 1984b) plus 'The Scientific Study of Religions in its Plurality' by Ninian Smart with Frank's 'An Additional Note on the Philosophy of Science and the Study of Religion' (Smart and Whaling 1984).

Frank believed that the Study of Religion/s as an academic field had been restricted too narrowly to those trained exclusively in (theology and) religious studies. He argued that 'there has been an increasingly complex involvement of the humane and social sciences in the study of religion to the extent that virtually any theory or method of investigation in any of the humane and social sciences can be and often is applied to specific sets of religious data' (Whaling 1984c: 22). Scholars of religion/s therefore need not be limited to pioneers associated with the founding of the field, such as Gerardus van der Leeuw, Rudolf Otto or Mircea Eliade, but could include social scientists like 'Lévi-Strauss, Berger and Bellah' (Whaling 1984c: 22). Finally, Frank anticipated new methods in response to advances in science and technology which he claimed would create new 'shoots' in the study of religion.

These insights were incorporated into the highly successful Religious Studies programme in the University of Edinburgh. The Combined Studies branch of the degree allowed students to integrate other disciplines into their MA (Hons) course in Religious Studies, as wide-ranging as anthropology, sociology, classics, philosophy, literature, politics and history. The programme was further adapted to include Area Studies such as Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Asian Studies and African Studies. During the 1990s, final year religion students enrolled in courses in Edinburgh that challenged the tendency to limit the subject matter to traditional 'religious' categories, such as beliefs, myths and rituals. Instead, they were encouraged to apply insights gained from their studies in religion to issues related to, for example, ecology or war and peace. This is illustrated in the mid-1990s by the fourth year Religious Studies course required of all MA (RS) students, 'The Greening of Religion'.

Under Frank's leadership, the programme's focus on religions (plural) was expressed not only on an international scale but in the immediate Scottish context. For example, Frank contributed a paper on the Brahma Kumaris to the innovative conference 'Contemporary Religions in Scotland' at the University of Stirling in January 1998. Organised by the social anthropologist Malory Nye, who had himself recently published a monograph on Hindus in Edinburgh, the conference's sub-headings announced a new, radical research agenda in a context dominated by studies of Scottish mainstream Christianity: 'Islam', 'Innovations in Christianity', 'New Age and neo-Paganism', and 'Hinduism and New Religions'. Extending this approach, Frank pointed out that the Scottish Christian field included

Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist and Pentecostal iterations. It also contained rich internal ethnic-cultural diversity: Orthodox Christianity alone, for example, could be sub-divided into Greek, Bulgarian, Russian, Ukrainian, Syrian, Ancient, British, Celtic and Coptic expressions (Whaling 1999: 18-21). Frank's careful empirical cataloguing anticipates the ethnographic granularity of the practice of religion/s in local and global contexts which has been pioneered in the Study of Religion/s.

Alongside his huge contribution to the establishment of Religious Studies in the School of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh and to the wider Study of Religion/s, Frank also made a very considerable contribution to the inter-faith scene in Edinburgh, and Scotland more widely, as founder, along with others, of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association. Set up in 1988, EIFA continues to flourish, under its Executive Director, Iain Stewart, and to make a substantial contribution to the development of better relations and understanding between the city's different religious communities, especially in the field of education. An Obituary by Prof Joe Goldblatt, the current Chair of the Board of EIFA, in *The Scotsman* on 14th December 2022, provides fuller details of Frank's contribution in this area.

As a student of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Frank worked hard to promote a better understanding of the full range of the religious traditions of the world, for example, through the volume mentioned above which he edited in honour of Smith. After his own substantial introductory essay, this volume looks at Faith and Tradition in five of the world's major religious traditions: the Hindu, the Confucian, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Muslim, before outlining seven current approaches to the Study of Religion, including chapters by John Hick, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Raimundo Panikkar, and Ninian Smart.

In his latter years he served as the editor of the invaluable 'Understanding Faith' series which was published by Dunedin Academic Press in Edinburgh and aimed at making understanding of religious traditions clear for a wide audience and highly accessible to the general public. In addition to the six traditions which are usually included in this kind of venture in the UK - Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism - this series was notable for also including Jainism, Chinese Religions, Baha'ism, and the Brahma Kumaris - and its convenient 120-page format means that the series continues to be useful for anyone who is looking for an accessible introduction to each of the faith traditions included within it.

A good example of how Frank applied methodological insights derived from his approach to Religious Studies is found in his book, *Understanding Hinduism* (2009), in which he describes Hinduism not only as a world religious tradition, but also as a world view. In addition to explaining the place of sacred scriptures, rituals and beliefs in Hindu traditions, he introduces new topics, such as aesthetics and spirituality. In line with his multi-disciplinary approach, he relates contemporary forms of Indian religions to political movements such as Hindutva. To his credit, he avoids restricting Hinduism to its 'higher' or philosophical elaborations, as was done in many classical textbooks on world religions, but includes explanations of 'village Hinduism' and describes the Hindu diaspora in Western societies, such as is found in Britain.

As a scholar of religion and religions, as a teacher and a colleague, Frank Whaling had an infectious excitement for his subject which he conveyed to those among whom he worked and transmitted to his students, who recall his kindness, generosity and clear Yorkshire voice. Near the conclusion of his introductory essay in the book he edited in honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Frank aptly demonstrated his enthusiasm for our discipline, which lends encouragement to those committed to a sometimes beleaguered and misunderstood field of study: 'Religious Studies is exciting, expanding, academically vibrant, pregnant with new seeds, and an integrally important part of contemporary scholarship' (Whaling 1984, 23). Not only does the School of Divinity in Edinburgh owe lasting gratitude for the quarter of a century Frank Whaling devoted to developing the academic programme

there but, more widely, scholars and students in many contexts have benefited and continue to benefit from Frank's global vision for the scope, influence and significance of the academic Study of Religions.

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"It has to be said that there was always one god or other, lying in ambush at the right place, with his reassuring look of an enigma personified"

(Hélène Cixous. 1976. *La - The Feminine*, (trans). Susan Sellers. 2013. p62)