

---

## BOOK REVIEW

---

Barker, Eileen, ed. 2013. *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*. Farnham: Ashgate. xiii + 271pp. ISBN 978 1 4094 6229 3. Hbk. £68.00. ISBN 978 1 4094 6230 9. Pbk. £19.99.

Cherry, Stephen M., and Helen Rose Ebaugh, eds. 2014. *Global Religious Movements across Borders: Sacred Service*. Farnham: Ashgate. xiv + 220pp. ISBN 978 1 4094 5687 2. Hbk. £65. ISBN 978 1 4094 5688 9. Pbk. £19.99.

Harvey, Sarah, and Suzanne Newcombe, eds. 2013. *Prophecy in the New Millennium: When Prophecy Persists*. Farnham: Ashgate. xiii + 295pp. ISBN 978 1 4094 4995 9. Hbk. £74.00. ISBN 978 1 4094 4996 6. Pbk. £26.00.

Kirkham, David M., ed. 2013. *State Responses to Minority Religions*. Farnham: Ashgate. xx + 278pp. ISBN 978 1 4724 1646 9. Hbk. £65.00. ISBN 978 1 4094 6579 9. Pbk. £19.99.

Miller, Timothy, ed. 2013. *Spiritual and Visionary Communities: Out to Save the World*. Farnham: Ashgate. x + 248pp. ISBN 978 1 4094 3902 8. Hbk. £68.00. ISBN 978 1 4094 3903 5. Pbk. £17.99.

*Reviewed by:* Maria Nita, Bath Spa University, Bath Spa University, Newton St Loe,  
Bath, BA2 9BN.  
m.nita@bathspa.ac.uk

*Keywords:* globalization; intentional communities; new religious movements;  
prophecy; religion and the state.

The Ashgate Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements is a timely scholarly collection in the field of New Religious Movements, which will be of great interest to both scholars in the field and outside of it, and equally accessible for students. Each of the five edited volumes brings together a rich mix of academics from different disciplines, who, often alongside ex-members, present specific fieldwork, research and theoretical models concerned with key and current themes in the field of new religions. The volumes in this series address subjects that are at the confluence of many disciplines and areas of inquiry, namely: revisionism and diversification in new religious movements, spiritual and visionary communities, prophecy in the new millennium, state responses to minority religions and global religious movements across borders. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the five books and often felt transported to the Inform seminars and other meetings and conferences that ignited and stimulated these valuable academic resources.

*Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*, edited by Eileen Barker, takes a retrospective look over the field posing a key question: what revisions lead to schisms? This is crucial to understanding new religions since religious traditions often embrace some

revisions thus preventing potential schisms. As the contributors in this volume show, the processes that enable different innovations to be accepted whilst others become marginalized or excluded, are extremely important for understanding new religious movements. Eileen Barker points out that new movements may be deemed acceptable to very rigorous scrutiny from traditional institutions, such as Opus Dei, the Catholic movement that was embraced by the Vatican, whilst other similar movements, such as the House of Prayer, were rejected.

This volume covers a great range of revisions and diversification in new religious movements, examining such key movements in the field as: the Family International, the Hare Krishna Movement, the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, Falungong and the Mormon Church, alongside some less well-known movements, such as La Mission de l'Esprit-Saint in Canada and the Orthodox Church of the Sovereign Mother of God led by Blessed Father John. The contributors bring to light and analyse a wealth of empirical evidence from very contemporary sources, echoing and contributing to key theories in the field.

Claire Borowik suggests that the main catalysts for diversification are growth and exclusivism, since as a tradition develops and grows it can become either exclusive or inclusive towards outsiders. Borowik takes an in-depth look at the Family International and its latest "reboot" (2010) under its new leadership that aims to calibrate the movement with today's world. The author discusses the developments in the church, showing similar trends with other millenarian movements that become more inclusive. Thus, the latest "reboot," Borowik notes, also replaces the original end-time expectation that the movement had entertained for decades, foreseeing "an extended future on this earth."

It is apparent in this volume that leadership changes tend to provoke the most abrupt revisions and Michael Mickler discusses some fundamental revisions and new models for the Unification Church in his "The Post-Sun Myung Moon Unification Church." These revisions are all very recent, having taken place after the death of Sun Myung Moon in 2012. Mickler discusses the competing models for the church that the next generation of Moon siblings are attempting to introduce alongside Mrs Moon's radical revisions. We can clearly see in this chapter how revisions always affect more areas than may be initially apparent, since these organizational revisions are not only administrative but deeply affect the theology of the Unification Church. Thus the author discusses the theological implications of Mrs Moon's matriarchal influence which included a recent revision (2013) by which members have been asked to address God as "Heavenly Parent" rather than "Heavenly Father."

All the contributions offer unique perspectives into the field of new religious movements and a wealth of theoretical models waiting to be examined and applied to new and changing contexts.

In *Global Religious Movements across Borders*, Stephen Cherry and Helen Rose Ebaugh bring together contributors from different disciplines and fields of study, such as History, Sociology and Theology, as well as Journalism, Cultural and Asian Studies, in a dialogue on global transnational networks and religion. This volume was inspired by a meeting for the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) in Baltimore, in 2010. The contributors' distinctive styles and approaches address different important areas, whilst shedding light on a common theme: the impact of globalization and transnationalism on religion as well as the effect of this latter on these international processes that have become greatly accelerated in an age of increased mobility and communication through social media.

Surveying global movements with roots in Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam which in turn have spread across Africa, America, Asia, Australia and Europe, the contributors to this volume focus on global service movements established through faith traditions and the role of religion in mobilizing collective action on an international scale.

The editors and contributors emphasize the role of religion in maintaining ethnic and cultural identities and in combating the stressors involved in the migration process. Thus religion, as Stephen Cherry contends in his editorial introduction, adapts to new environments by a paradoxical process of hybridization and pristinization, by adapting new local elements whilst shedding some old cultural traits, to help demarcate the new community from other immigrants who may share common cultural repertoires.

In the first case study in this volume, Afe Adogame looks at an indigenous African Pentecostal Church in Nigeria, The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) which, in the process of becoming a global movement through migration, has maintained its African roots but has extended its religious scope to health and education, particularly through raising awareness of HIV and AIDS. Helen Rose Ebaugh looks at the Gülen Movement, a Muslim-inspired cultural movement that has roots in 1970s' Turkey, and has since grown internationally. Discussing a movement which established schools and centres in over 180 countries, Ebaugh examines the dual processes of cultural adaptation and local reception of the movement.

Arun Brahmbhatt looks at different encounters between Christianity and Hinduism in the context of colonialism, missionaryism and social change. Brahmbhatt insightfully examines ways in which religion in the West becomes embodied in a rhetoric of "ethnic citizenship" and the social capital transnational migrants can access by performing religious identities in the context of a multicultural society. As Stephen Cherry persuasively concludes, the study of transnational global service movements rooted in religious traditions is a new and fascinating field of enquiry that demands scholarly involvement.

*Prophecy and the New Millennium: When Prophecy Persists*, edited by Sarah Harvey and Suzanne Newcombe, investigates apocalyptic imagination and prophecy in the new millennium, in a topical and current collection of essays from a variety of approaches: sociological, historical, theological – to name a few. As in the other volumes of this series, the editors offer a rich mix of approaches and include fascinating insider perspectives in the form of case studies, such as: "Living in the Time of the End: A Personal Commentary from my Experiences with the Children of God and the Family International," by Abi Freeman May and "The Dispensation of Providence: Growing up as a Blessed Child in the Unification Church," by Hani Zaccarelli, both offering an essential insider perspective that complements the empirical research and theoretical models put forward in the other chapters.

Michael Barkun opens the academic conversation on prophecy by looking at prophetic behaviours, and identifies four main types: spokesperson for a deity, interpreters of scripture, knowledge from a transcendent source (such as ascended masters) and finally secular analysts who predict apocalyptic futures. However, Barkun includes analysts who predict environmental disasters into the prophetic fold and supports his claim by arguing that their statements influence public opinion and may be used for religious purposes, despite their scientific or empirical sources. This inclusion is somewhat puzzling to me and I would argue, alongside other scholars concerned with environmental discourse, that climate models are not prophetic despite the fact that they may summon up apocalyptic imagery, because, firstly, prophecy assumes an anthropocentric focus that is absent from scientific models that measure the degradation of biodiversity and, secondly, after all, apocalyptic language is the only language humanity has for large-scale disasters. However, this chapter remains interesting and engaging on the whole. It further discusses the role of the Internet as a "unique platform" that helps "mainstreaming the fringe," disseminating fringe ideas and thus involving and encouraging new prophetic voices.

Simon Dein examines the role of ritual in keeping prophecy alive through performance and media. Andrew Maguire looks at prophecy in the early Christian church, focusing on Christocentric interpretation and predictions of the end times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Maguire discusses the prophetic retrojection in the book of Daniel and questions the wider implications for prophecy and its emphasis on the present time rather than the future or the past. He further investigates the historical context in which the authority of the prophets was transferred to the authoritative canon of scripture.

The last part of this volume is dedicated to a number of case studies on the 2012 synchronistic prophecies phenomenon, which attests not only to the survival of millennialism but to the new dimensions prophecy can aggregate in a global age, when assisted by social media and global networks.

*State Responses to Minority Religions*, edited by David Kirkham, brings together 17 international scholars and experts in law from the fields of sociology, religious studies, political science and others, to address the important question of what rights minority religions have and what protection they are offered by their respective states. A rich mix of international case studies, with diverse contributions from Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan, China, Canada, South Africa, as well as many countries in Central, Eastern and Western Europe, provide important contrast for the treatment of new religious movements around the world.

Cole Durham opens this dialogue with a legal overview to state reactions to minority religions. Durham clearly emphasizes the key role that minority religions have played in our growing need and demand for religious freedom. Nazila Ghanea looks at “The UN Human Rights Committee and Religious Minorities” and posits that although minority religions helped frame the UN minority rights, they have been sidelined from the minority rights regime.

With many of the case studies in this volume we come across grave misuses of power and governments’ failures to protect members from new religious movements. From small acts of persecution and intolerance, all the way to forced conversions, torture and murder, we are reminded of the precious gift that freedom of religion and belief for all can be.

*Spiritual and Visionary Communities*, edited by Timothy Miller, looks at some very influential intentional communities whilst considering a variety of connected themes and inquiring into what is happening to intentional communities as a whole. Intentional communities are often the preferred mode of expression for New Religious Movements, thus making the central question of this volume extremely pertinent for the field of study as a whole, namely: are intentional communities actually growing or declining today? The contributors address this question and others by looking at some old and new intentional communities.

A great variety of visionary communities are explored in this volume, Western and Eastern, old and new, from the kibbutz movement to the New Kadampa Tradition community. Contributors look at communities that attempt to innovate and find new models of living in the world, a tendency that has persisted over millennia, as the editor of this volume explores in his introduction.

Etta Madden begins this discussion by exploring the challenges of sustaining changes in an intentional community. Madden examines the philosophies of change at Damanhur, in Italy, as a community that successfully continues to change and adapt to the changes happening in the outside world. The author discusses both internal and external changes, such as ageing family members needing to be looked after by members or adult children leaving the community. Susan Palmer looks at how the negative media attention surrounding Aumisme, a religious movement in the French Alps, contributed to its isolation. Palmer discusses the ways in which the image of Aumisme and its relationship with the outside world was profoundly shaped by the collaborations between the media and the anti-cult movement.

Some articles explore the intricate relationship between insiders and outsiders, looking at how communities view the outside world and how they are perceived from the outside. For example, H. C. Lazebnik looks at “The Intersection of White-Racist Communes and

the American Legal System.” Lazebnik particularly examines the role of religion in holding together the white-racist milieu, and further explores intersections between anti-Semitism, neo-Paganism and Christianity. The author very insightfully explores the post 9/11 context of this sub-culture, alongside the criminalization and ensuing re-affirmation of this milieu.

This volume poses a great number of important current questions that are particularly relevant for scholars of religion today, at a time when many utopian communities are in the centre of public attention.