
BOOK REVIEW

Chryssides, G. D., and B. E. Zeller. 2014. *The Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements*. London & New York: Bloomsbury. xxiv + 427pp. ISBN 978-1-44119-005-5. Hbk. £90.00.

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The Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements (BCNRM) is a comprehensive, multi-levelled, key reader for both students and advanced researchers. Looking towards the past, present and the future of the field, the *BCNRM* is an indispensable text for new religious movements (NRMs) scholars yet reaching well beyond the boundaries of this field. Through its focused and forward-looking lenses, the *BCNRM* successfully demonstrates that the NRMs “microcosm” is not an isolated, peripheral or self-contained specialist field, as it is sometimes under-represented or misunderstood to be, but a rich and central domain in the study of religion. This collection of essays will prove equally engaging for both specialists and non-specialist scholars who can find here an authoritative and structured approach to the study of NRMs.

The *BCNRM*, with a foreword by Massimo Introvigne, is prefaced by Chryssides and Zeller’s editorial introduction, which situates the NRMs field within the larger study of religion and the sociology of religion, clearly chronicling its development and significant milestones for both the public and academics, as well as stating the main themes, issues and problems in the field. As Chryssides and Zeller eloquently show here, the study of NRMs has undergone some major transformations from its somewhat uncertain inception in the 1960s, through the anti-cult movement controversies in the 1970s and with the founding of INFORM (Information Network on Religious Movements) in London, and CESNUR (Centre for the Studies on New Religions) in Torino, Italy in the late 1980s.

Taking a thematic approach to the field, the *BCNRM* is structured around three main areas: (1) research methods and problems, (2) current research areas, and (3) new directions in the study of NRMs. The first part of the *BCNRM* reviews the

main developments in the field of NRMs, stating and contributing towards some central debates of how we academically study new religions. Since many of the chapters in this first part are authored by some distinguished voices of their respective fields, such as Graham Harvey (Pagan Studies), Steven Sutcliffe (New Age) and Douglas Davies (Mormon Studies), this is not simply a collection of what has gone before in a particular area or new religion, but the chapters engage with current debates and present new avenues of investigation and research. Even if one or two chapters in this first part do not offer a discussion of the implications for future research, they are all richly illustrated overviews of the research and scholarship in their particular fields.

In Part II (Current Research and Issues), we find those topics that have developed as some of the main foci in the field of NRMs, such as conversion and brainwashing, charisma and leadership, violence, legal issues, and gender. Again the authors here are often those who have made major contributions to the areas under discussion, such as Marion Bowman on vernacular/lived religion or Catherine Wessinger on millennialism. The research issues examined here are not limited to new religions, but are relevant to all those undertaking fieldwork in the study of religion.

One criticism that could be raised here is the fact that some of the entries are not consistent in offering the literary reviews that most chapters do offer but focus instead on exploring some primary sources in more depth. Yet, this turns out to be a refreshing approach, where the magnifying glass of the *BCNRM*, gliding and scrutinizing the field, stops and focuses more intensely, piercing through the academic debates and looking at the exchanges that are taking place on the ground. For example, in the opening essay of this second part, "Jonestown and the Study of NRMs," Rebecca Moore investigates the poetry, prose, art and music that came out of the Jonestown survivors, contemporaries and many other unseen casualties of the tragedy. Here Moore offers a stylistic analysis and an application of Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory, thus illustrating new approaches to the field as well as its inherent interdisciplinarity.

The third part of the *BCNRM* is concerned with new directions, looking at such topics as the role of the internet, invented religions, globalization and travel and NRMs. Here we encounter fieldwork problems that have yet to be resolved, such as studying new online religions, interpreting missionary activities in the social media or even the ethical problems that come with being a researcher in the virtual 3D reality "Second Life." A double filtering often takes place in these chapters, as authors first bring the insights gained in their respective areas onto the NRMs table and then analyse the implications for religious studies more generally.

The *BCNRM* covers more ground than any other reader in the field, being a comprehensive text, where specialist chapters are balanced with a complementary

A-Z guide to key concepts (Part IV) and a helpful list of academic resources (Part V). Dedicated to Eileen Barker, founder and director of INFORM, on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2013, the *BCNRM* represents a milestone, showing off the fieldwork gems that have been extracted and polished out of the early disorder and controversy of over half a century worth of studies and standing as a guide for future research in this fascinating and dynamic field.