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Book Reviews

Sutcliffe, S.J. (ed.), 2004, *Religion: Empirical Studies.* Aldershot: Ashgate. xliii + 279 pp. £50.00 (hbk.). ISBN: 0754641589.

In this volume Steven Sutcliffe explores the significance of 'qualitative empiricism' as a common ground across the field of Religious Studies. The collection of 15 revised papers, originally given by scholars of religion from diverse backgrounds at conferences of the British Association for the Study of Religion from the early 1990s onward, marks the fiftieth anniversary of BASR and exemplifies the use of qualitative empirical methods. In a Foreword Peggy Morgan, a former president of the Association traces its history. Sutcliffe makes an impressive analysis of reasons for the ongoing crisis in Religious Studies in the UK and in an Afterword James Cox suggests the way forward for the Study of Religions.

Steven Sutcliffe associates the methodological mix of contributors and of BASR with Ninian Smart's polymethodic approach, which he compares to 'an intellectual feast with an open invitation to table' (p. xviii). He explains how the view that the Study of Religion/s is a 'field' rather than a 'discipline' is a model more compatible with the postmodern emphasis on polyvocality. He alerts us to the longstanding demarcation issue as to who should be excluded from the 'feast' on methodological grounds. Sutcliffe points to various internal and external power relations which contribute to predicament of the Study of Religions. These include, firstly, the historical oppositional construction of naturalistic and scientific analysis of religions versus theological and confessional standpoints which has privileged theology; secondly, the power of economic forces and intellectual fashion; and thirdly the historically masculine hegemony within Religious Studies.

The chapters, divided into two parts, represent methodological currents in BASR scholarship. Part One comprises seven chapters on comparative theory and method and Part Two, eight case studies of particular traditions which utilize qualitative empiricism. In Chapter One Marion Bowman defends the descriptive basis of phenomenological fieldwork in the frequently undervalued field of assessing and representing 'vernacular' religion. She presents this methodology in terms of a case study of folk religion and Catholicism in Newfoundland. In Chapter Two Chris Arthur draws attention to 'media blindness' in religious studies normalizing a print media approach and assuming a 'Protestant' methodological basis. Arthur examines the way in which media actively produces discourses rather than disseminating them. Peter Antes, in Chapter Three examines the construction of experience in religious and non-religious traditions. He argues that experiences, both religious and non-religious, are produced by practitioners as an ongoing contextual process.

The next three chapters problematize terminologies frequently used in Religious Studies. In Chapter Four, Terence Thomas explores the recent usage of the term 'sacred' and 'the sacred' contrasting his findings with the concept of sacrality within the Hebrew Bible. He argues that the use of the term 'the sacred' has a theological and ethnocentric basis, especially in relation to the Judao-Christian traditions or comparative works made from a Judaeo-Christian standpoint. In Chapter Five Kim Knott considers contemporary debates about

community and culture from the viewpoint of a scholar of religion. She addresses the tension between working without assuming either 'community' or 'religion' as given and pre-existing more essentializing notions of these terms. In Chapter Six Gerrie ter Haar explores the use of the concept of 'diaspora' in the modern world through the example of religious identity formation among African Christian diaspora in the Netherlands. In Chapter Seven Brian Bocking defends post-Smartian phenomenological methodology in the study of religion demonstrating its value through a case study of Shinto-Buddhist iconography in Japan. He argues current audits of departmental academic performance utilize a phenomenological methodology and utilizes this ironic situation to examine the ethical impact of such scrutiny upon the researched.

Part Two of the volume includes eight chapters built upon empirical historical studies of specific traditions. In Chapter Eight, Richard Gombrich makes a comparative survey of religious experience as represented by William James and the Pali canon of early Buddhist texts. In Chapter Nine Miranda Aldhouse-Green surveys the range of representations of the feminine as Goddess in Celtic and Romano Celtic traditions based on archaeological evidence. In Chapter Ten, Julia Leslie analyses the roles of *Sati* and widowhood for women on the death of their husbands as prescribed by Classical Sanskrit religious law. In Chapter Eleven Ria Kloppenborg analyses the public debate between Christian missionaries and indigenous Buddhists in Sri Lanka in 1873 in the context of the rise of Buddhist modernism and interfaith encounters and syncretisms. In Chapter Twelve Armin W. Geertz analyses Hopi Indian initiation practices, especially in relation to the violent initiation of children, from a number of methodological perspectives including sociology, social psychology and cognitive theory.

The final three chapters take up the issue of cultural encounter and the political impact of religion and its study. In Chapter Thirteen Elizabeth Amoah explores innovation in African religion, particularly in Ghana, and finds innovation and syncretism to be inevitable functions of religious plurality. George D. Chryssides develops the notion of syncretism in Chapter Fourteen, in the context of the emergence of the Unification Church from its origins as a mixture of South Korean folk/Shamanic practices and Christian tradition. He explores the tensions between Unification Church beliefs and western evangelical critiques and how, briefly internationalized as a new religious movement, it has more recently become just one of many new movements which has led to its re-emphasis on its local roots. In Chapter Fifteen Tariq Modood examines the challenge to secular multiculturalism in the UK by the politics of difference based on religious equality specifically in relation to Muslims. He suggests that the liberal model of tolerance is challenged by a post-secularist model asserting the right of public difference in religion in general and of Muslim identity in particular.

In an Afterword James Cox suggests that post-Smart, the academic study of religion has been dominated by the 'methodological agnosticism'. Following Fitzgerald (2000) he suggests that insistence on suspension of personal judgement represents a form of liberal theology even if transcendentally focused though denial. By dissociating religion and the sacred and focusing on the social context of lived religion scholars no longer seek to isolate the essence of religion. Cox concludes it has become clear that scholars of religions cannot avoid the fact that religions must be studied as located social and cultural expressions.

It is difficult to do justice to this timely volume in so few words. It represents not only a rich methodological 'feast' but also an analysis which has implications for the future of Religious Studies. By separating the sacred from religion a methodological middle ground between religion and culture is restored and the future of Religious Studies secured.

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Partridge, Christopher (ed.), 2003, *Encyclopedia of New Religions: New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities.* Oxford: Lion Publishing. 446 pp. £25.00 (hbk.). ISBN: 9780745950730.

While we are not short of contemporary reference books in the Study of Religion (the second edition of Eliade's classic *Encyclopedia of Religion* is due to be published in December 2004), Christopher Partridge's *Encyclopedia of New Religions* offers something refreshingly novel. He has produced an attractive, single-volume reference work that is accessible, wide-ranging and—most importantly—highly useful. Its compact size (still stretching to some 446 pages) comes with a price, the editor adhering to a specific definition of 'new' religions. This limits his coverage to those phenomena which may count as 'a religious sect or alternative spirituality that emerged or *rose to prominence* during the 20th century.' (p. 20) While this precludes historical comparisons with many obsolete sectarian groups from earlier periods, e.g. the Mennonites or the Qumran Community, readers can refer to other well-known works for these discussions. Partridge's focus throughout is on movements of cultural and religious relevance within the late modern global context. It is also presented as a corrective to the 'parochialism' of earlier accounts of NRMs, which have tended to highlight western, late-twentieth-century counter-culture as a centre of gravity. According to Partridge, this tendency has excluded and marginalized movements which have emerged and migrate elsewhere, and his conviction is reflected in the inclusion of numerous articles on non-western movements such as Candomblé (brought to Brazil by Yoruba slaves) and Falun Gong (originating and thriving in contemporary China).

The book is divided into nine main sections, the first eight each dealing with a key religious tradition: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Indian Religions, The Religions of East Asia, Indigenous and Pagan Traditions, and Western New Age Traditions. Each section contains an overview essay, followed by a series of articles—written by renowned experts—on specific groups or movements that have developed out of this tradition. These appear in chronological order, thus highlighting some interesting historical connections between the movements covered. A ninth section is concerned with 'Modern Western Cultures', intended to accommodate those movements which do not have their roots primarily in a specific religious tradition or group of traditions, but whose beliefs and practices are fundamentally shaped by the broader values of the modern west (for example, Scientology). While many of the articles are fairly brief, the editor has included 25 'feature' articles—appearing sporadically throughout the book—on various thematic issues or movements such as 'communal groups', 'contemporary Sufism', 'martial arts' and 'feminist and eco-feminist spirituality' (the latter covered in a particularly impressive, far-ranging article by Ursula King).

The volume includes an excellent index but only a basic bibliography. However, the editor makes good use of web technology in referring readers to more extensive reading lists available on the publisher's website. This is an excellent resource, with items—both printed and web-based—sub-divided into the categories used in the book, distinguishing publications according to the root tradition out of which their subjects have emerged. Against each item is given the name of the movement addressed, a useful feature, especially when browsing through the more opaque titles available.

The writing throughout this volume is lucid and balanced, serving as a sound source of knowledge for both the seasoned expert and the interested non-academic. But Partridge's

Encyclopedia is also to be distinguished from previous books like it by the inclusion of numerous colour photographs. These provide vivid—sometimes breath-taking—illustrations of the movements covered, and add a great deal to the appeal of the book as a whole. This innovative and creatively presented volume will prove to be highly useful to higher education teachers and researchers, given that it covers a huge breadth of phenomena, beyond the expertise of any single academic. At £25, it is also a resource that is within the means of many undergraduates, and while not a textbook, Partridge's *Encyclopedia* could prove to be a standard student text in years to come.

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York, M., 2004, *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements.* Oxford: Scarecrow Press. xxxii + 233 pp. £46.00 (hbk.). ISBN 0810848732.

The *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements* is the forty-ninth in a series of 'Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies and Movements' edited by Jon Woronoff. It is a useful addition to sourcebooks on the New Age. In a much-contested area within the Study of Religions it provides an extended definition of the term 'New Age'. As a dictionary that focuses on the historical it provides substantive content to that definition. For the beginner it is a useful reference to the bewildering array of ideas, names and religious terminology associated with the term 'New Age'.

Whether the varied phenomena of the New Age can be considered as a singular movement or plural set of movements, as the title of this text has it, remains a moot point. York does not establish in this text, with its manifold entries on multiform beliefs and practices, that there is a specific New Age orientation. In fact he keeps the waters muddy. In places he offers specific and well-bounded definitions while in others his categorization becomes so omnivorous that it includes most forms of religious expression from traditional to modern and classical to post modern. Thus we find entries on Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity; Kabbalah (but not Judaism); Sufism (but not Islam); Theosophy, New Thought and Feminist spirituality. But York is right to maintain the 'ambiguity' and 'boundary-indeterminateness' (his terms) of the New Age, for it is not monolithic.

In the introduction York highlights three areas that he sees at the heart of New Age—Gnosis, healing and New Thought. The former he defines in terms of a prelapsarian idealism. 'New Age', he states, 'seeks to regain an original state of Gnostic grace and re-find the spark of divinity latent within each individual' (p. 4). While the second area York finds everywhere prevalent among the phenomena of New Age:

> The focus is almost invariably on healing—healing the body of infirmity, healing the mind of doubt, confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety and healing the spirit from separation and darkness (p. 6).

Thus we find significant entries on 'healing' and on the many self-designated healers throughout the *Dictionary*. However, for York, even healing is to be subsumed within a Gnostic paradigm. Healing is achieved through experience of a unitive knowledge. This is a fair argument but perhaps overstates a 'one-sidedly intellectualistic' (to appropriate Otto's phrase) perception of New Age. York's emphasis on gnosis glosses over the experiential element of spirituality and healing emphasized by New Age insiders. The 'seeking' element of New Age spirituality involves more than gnosis, for it is a search that includes specific forms of knowledge *and* specific types of experience.

York's interest in what may be perceived as a doctrinal core to New Age is evident in the third core area, New Thought, which he defines within the dictionary entry as 'a chief predecessor of New Age'. York recognizes that New Thought may be a specifically American orientation, but its influences he contests, especially via *A Course in Miracles*, affect New Age worldwide. While the *Dictionary* is not intended to be a sustained argument, York's emphasis on New Thought needs more support—for this reviewer the role of New Thought in New Age is overstated.

Two further types of reference are available in the *Dictionary*—the index and a chronology of events. Given the range of entries one would expect an extensive list of primary sources as well as secondary scholarly studies. However, the index runs to barely four pages—a serious weakness in this type of resource. The chronology offers a singular history of key events in the constructed narrative of New Age. I am always wary of such devices. Unless they offer a chronology of a very small set of phenomena or are enormously detailed they can only offer personal snapshots of complex histories. Nevertheless, if one presumes that no chronology can offer total history, and that any chronology in a text such as this will be a sweeping overview, York's chronology offers an interesting guide to many seminal events in the growth of the New Age. Thus he begins with the publication of Huang Ti's acupuncture manual, *c.* 2600 BCE, followed by the 'first mention of Taoism'—97 BCE—before settling into European and American events beginning in 1555 with Nostradamus' prophecies and ending on 21 December 2012 with José Arguelles' prediction of the beginning of the Aquarian Age.

I like the book as a teacher and a lay reader. *Historical Dictionary of New Age Movements* provides useful introductions to the key components of New Age for the general reader. But it is also a useful quick reference for students and academics not quite sure of their terminology. It is certainly the case that New Age is a common example in a range of academic courses—as an example of popular culture, a symptom of a Weberian last gasp of secularization, or, as a recent media literate has called it, 'mumbo jumbo' poor philosophy. Yet too many of these authorities have little depth in their knowledge of New Age, in part because they have little historical understanding of the antecedents and chains of intellectual history that inform New Age. This small dictionary provides some of the necessary depth to make genuine informed commentary on the phenomena of the New Age.

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de Michelis, Elizabeth, 2004, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism*. London and New York: Continuum. xvii + 282 pp. £75.00. ISBN 0826465129.

Yoga, amongst other Indian practices, has been widely embraced by 'westerners' as a portal into the 'Mystic East' (King 1999); that is, it has come to function as an important medium of the enculturation of Indian religious practices into modern 'western' cultures, with all the potential for the homogenization and decontextualization of what are, in fact, a very diverse set of practices disseminated within both popular and elite use contexts. The position taken by the author of this new study is that there is an 'elective affinity' between Vivekananda's late-nineteenth-century re-working of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, and the kind of 'western' occult and 'esoteric' ideology that, she claims, would be a major shaper of 'New Age religion' in the twentieth century. The result is a historical study of the emergence and development of modern western yoga, especially of modern postural yoga (MPY), and of Iyengar yoga in particular. The author, Elizabeth de Michelis, was Director of the Dharam Hinduja Institute of Indic Research (DHIIR; est. 1995) in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge University between

2000 and 2004. Since then, she has continued to work as Research Fellow in the university's Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies.

A word of warning to readers of *Fieldwork in Religion*: this is a historical and textual study. No sustained fieldwork theory or data is drawn upon, although the author does mention that she is a long-term yoga practitioner (pp. xii-xiii, 1), and she also promises (p. 15; but does not actually deliver) fieldwork evidence in support of her reading of B.K. Lyengar's texts. The final brief chapter does provide an ethnographic sketch of a modern MPY session 'as might be experienced by any beginner' (p. 251), but it is not much developed with reference to ethnographic methodologies.

On first sight, then, the book would seem to offer little of direct relevance to debates on the theory and practice of fieldwork in religion. However, it would be a mistake for ethnographers to finish there, for—apart from the author's particular argument on the 'western' acculturation of yoga—the book's historical method serves as an opportunity for reflection on appropriate methodologies in the contemporary study of religions—of yoga, or anything else. This point deserves far more detailed development than is possible here, both in terms of debates on theorizing and writing ethnography, and in stimulating wider discussions on appropriate methodology in the study of religions more generally where, on the whole, historical method tends to be either eschewed or engaged in rather perfunctorily. Granted, one of the main streams feeding the modern field of the Study of Religions has been 'History of Religions'. However, 'history' in this guise is a moot point. Arguably, 'History of Religions' has tended—with honourable exceptions—to be employed to protect religion as something *sui generis* by differentiating it as 'historical' only insofar as it 'manifests' *in* history; or else it is understood as a rather bare chronology of events. In both cases, this is clearly not 'history' in the sense understood by, say, economic, social and cultural historians, whom I suggest we have much to learn from in the Study of Religions.

However this issue is pursued in its details, I would simply argue here that some measure of historical background is not only *useful* but *essential*, both for configuring fieldworkers' practice (in terms of minimally contextualizing their 'data', at the point of its production) and for informing the writing—and of course the reading(s)—of the resultant ethnographic text. So de Michelis' study can be read in two ways: as a particular narrative history of MPY emergence, development and—in the Iyengar context—standardization, under the constraints of the mutually-infusing forces generated by Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantic 'mission' to 'the West' and the 'western'-Orientalist fascination with 'the mystic East'; and more ruminatively, as a trigger for methodological reflection on the role and function of historical analysis in the study of religions more generally—especially the field of 'new religions', with which MPY can be aligned.

De Michelis sets out her agenda in the Introduction. Her key dates are 1849 and 1896 (pp. 2-3): the former is claimed as the first recorded identification by a 'westerner' as a yoga practitioner (Henry David Thoreau); the latter, the publication of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, a launch pad for his 'counter-missionary project' (p. 3). De Michelis settles on MPY as her main case study, by which she means types of yoga emphasizing postures or *asanas*: that is, 'the more "physical" or gymnastic-like type of yoga' (p. 4). B.K. Lyengar's school is taken to epitomize this tradition. The author then introduces two large claims. The first is that the cultural history of modern yoga has been misrepresented through the hegemony, in the academy, of a position she calls 'esoteric myopia' (p. 9)—that is, a general unwillingness on the part of scholars to take seriously the impact of 'esoteric' ideology on the formation of modern religious movements (and indeed in the history of religions more generally). The second is that Vivekananda, whom de Michelis treats as the pioneer figure in the transmission of modern yoga, was inheritor of Brahmo Samaj ideology rather than the Ramakrishna tradition he invoked in public. Within this twofold context the author sets the emergence and development of

modern yoga, a genre which she represents as 'the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga' and which 'evolved mainly through the interaction of Western individuals interested in Indian religions and a number of more or less Westernized Indians' (p. 2).

In Chapter One, de Michelis draws heavily on the work of Antoine Faivre and especially Wouter Hanegraafff (1996) in order to define 'western esotericism' and find affinities between it and Neo-Vedantic occultism; she then situates modern yoga traditions within an 'esotericization of modern Hinduism' (p. 31), which she finds to be the outcome of this elective affinity. In Chapter Two, she explores nineteenth-century Bengali intellectual circles, and especially the Brahmo Samaj, which, she argues 'should be seen as the structural correlative of the Western [movements] that contributed to the elaboration of New Age religion' (p. 13); Vivekananda emerges as its chief spokesperson. Chapter Three explores Vivekananda's 'tormented religious quest' (p. 13) in greater detail, which she sees as formative in the historical dissemination of a modern ideology of yoga. Chapter Four looks at the syncretic concepts of 'god-realization' and 'self-realization' developed in this neo-Vedantic/'esoteric' milieu which, she argues, approximate to the Upanisadic terms *brahmajnana* and *atmajnana*.

Part Two moves into an analysis of modern yoga proper. Chapter Five examines its textual basis in Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, which de Michelis treats as the foundation document of modern yoga, through its self-consciously modern and 'scientific' treatment of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Chapter Six then provides a historical overview of twentieth-century modern yoga, largely on the basis of British sources, including a typology of modern practices (p. 188). Three seminal post-1950 periods are briefly identified: popularization, 1950s to mid-1970s; consolidation, mid-1970s to late 1980s; acculturation, mid-1980s to date (pp. 191-94). At the end of this chapter, B.K. Lyengar's version of yoga is introduced, and Chapter Seven takes up in detail the intellectual development of his ideas through a close reading of his 'modern yoga trilogy' (p. 208), composed in 1966, 1981 and 1993 (and therefore handily isomorphic with the author's periodization). Finally, Chapter Eight provides a brief picture of MPY as a 'healing ritual of modern secular religion', drawing on van Gennep's well-known but dated model of ritual as a threefold act of separation, transition and incorporation.

I am not an Indologist and so cannot comment in detail on the author's argument in the Bengali and Neo-Vedantic contexts. However, I would like to comment briefly on two problematic aspects of her methodology when read from the 'western' side of her MPY synthesis. First, her account is over-reliant on Antoine Faivre's ideal-typical model of 'western esotericism' (pp. 19-27), especially as developed in relation to 'New Age religion' by Wouter Hanegraafff (1996). A good portion of Chapter One is taken up with explicating this position, with very little reference to any alternative models or approaches. In the case of modelling 'New Age' in particular, there is now a fairly substantial literature that is not confined to the text-based history of ideas approach favoured by Faivre and Hanegraafff, but which incorporates sociological, ethnographical and socio-historical analyses; these merit close attention. In the case of the signifier 'esoteric', I would argue that uncritical assimilation of a term derived from the Greek prefix *eso* ('within'), meaning 'intelligible only to those with special knowledge' or 'intended for the initiated' (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 8th edition), privileges, both epistemologically and politically, a particular set of *emic* interpretations of experience which the historical record shows to have typically been held by elite social groups. In this connection, Faivre's 'six characteristics' of 'western esotericism', presented by him as an analytical typology and adopted as such by Hanegraafff (pp. 21ff.)—on whom de Michelis bases her presentation—are effectively statements of (intuitive) appreciation rather than (transparent) analytical concepts, and as such are conceptually inappropriate. A different methodological angle on these matters would open up the 'live link between East and West' (p. 20) that the author finds inscribed in yoga practices, to more materialist and therefore more contestable modes of analysis. In any case, the twentieth-century acculturation of MPY in

'western' culture is surely less a function of 'secrecy' or 'initiation' than of the *popularization* of practices within majority ethnic ('white') lower-middle-class and middle-class constituencies, a process that goes against the grain of the homogenization and privilege imparted by the notion of 'esotericization'. In this light, the focus on Iyengar yoga as a meta-narrative of acculturation requires greater justification when set against the heteroprax diffusion of popular 'occult' yoga ideologies in Anglophone cultures throughout the twentieth century, from regular articles in *The Occult Review* (London) and the pioneering narratives of Paul Brunton in the 1920s and 1930s, to rational-economic presentations of yoga as an everyday 'life-management' practice from the 1950s onwards.

Second, there is a firm and surprising avoidance of the manifold colonial and postcolonial contexts of modern yoga's formulation and dissemination. Edward Said's Orientalism debate, which has had both incisive and cruder effects, is dismissed in one sentence (p. 9). Taken with the homogenization of 'esotericism' discussed above, the effect is inevitably to shift attention away from the social, economic and political impact of the British Empire and its markets upon the formation of modern yogas, to a more abstracted, methodologically individualist argument, which favours the role of (charismatic) personalities, (rarefied) intellectual ideas and (elite) cadres in cultural exchanges. While these may indeed be formative in particular cases, they cannot be read as given; and they certainly do not function in a vacuum. In other words, more attention needs to be paid to the effects of wider socio-structural constraints on the production of modern yoga ideologies, both in 'the East' and in 'the West'.

But incorporating these methodological preferences would produce a rather different work. Taken on its own terms, which are fluently argued, if inclined to essentialize and homogenize historical and cultural complexities, the author provides an accessible history of a particular intellectual formation and dissemination of a significant modern religious practice. The volume is attractively produced with good use of illustrations. All scholars of yoga(s)—historians *and* fieldworkers—and methodologists in the study of religion(s) more generally, will want to engage with it.

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