

Editors' Introduction

FREDRIK GREGORIUS AND VENETIA ROBERTSON

A bit late we are happy to finally publish the next edition of the *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*. The body of this issue offers five distinct approaches to the study of new religions. The first article is a study on mental health and Satanism by Eric Sprankle, Zane Hensel, Todd Jennings and Tayler Lyng, “Mark of the Beast: The Relationships Between Satanist Identity, Stigma, and Mental Health.” Focused on how a stigmatized identity affects mental health and problems of discrimination it provides a quantitative perspective on the lived experience of being a Satanist. Derived from a study of 1,272 respondents it also provides a view on how Satanism has changed regarding gender and political sympathies. The sample consists mainly of members from the Satanic Temple, with a significant minority from the Church of Satan.

Second is “Cuckoos in the Nest: Christaligment and Conversion through “Spiritual Espionage” by Monica Alice Quirk. Her article proposes a new term “spiritual espionage” for the practice, found among some evangelical churches, of infiltrating competing religious and spiritual communities to undermine their beliefs and convert members to their version of Christianity. As examples the article use Christaligment in Australia, Shincheonji in South Korea, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the USA. The use of “New Age” motifs in the covert efforts of Christaligment to appeal to potential converts makes this an especially intriguing addition to broader discussions of conversion techniques and tactics.

The third article is by Anna Lutkajtis: “Ministry of the Mushroom: Psilocybin Churches, Psychedelic Experience and Sacred Sensemaking.” Arguing for a growing interest in the psychedelic compound psilocybin

and an increase in psilocybin mushroom churches in the United States, the article looks at the role such hallucinogens or “entheogens” have in the creation of sacred sensemaking. This is related to social dynamics and ritual processes as ways of experiencing the divine, as can be seen in the development of specific religious groups based on the practice of ingesting mushrooms.

The fourth article, “New Thought and the ‘none-ing’ phenomenon: a secularization or re-sacralization process?” by Philippe Murillo deals with the problematic character of so-called secularization and what is regarded as a religious identity. Using the recent emergence of “nones” in studies on religious affiliation Murillo questions the historical existence of “nones” using New Thought as an example of a phenomenon that can be seen as a more unorganized form of spirituality that could be compared to the recent emergence of “nones.” Extensive fieldwork with the New Thought community in the US enables Murillo to contribute important data to the study of “spiritual but not religious” rhetoric so common to groups that seem to defy a clear boundary between the secular and the religious.

The final article is the second part of Francesco Piraino’s study of contemporary Sufism with “Sufism Meets the New Age Discourse Part 2: Ethnography among the Naqshbandiyya-Ḥaqqāniyya in Italy.” Here he applies his analytical framework developed in Part 1, published in our last issue, to his ethnographic work with the Naqshbandiyya-Ḥaqqāniyya in Italy. Over the course of these two discussions, Piraino reinvigorates methodological discussions around “the New Age” and demonstrates the ongoing relevance on this topic in the example of the recent phenomenon of European Sufi orders.

Finally, this issue comprises six reviews of recent scholarly works relevant to the study of new religions. We have Jessica Albrecht who reviews *Invisible Hosts: Performing the Nineteenth-Century Spirit Medium’s Autobiography*, by Elizabeth Schleber (SUNY Press, 2017). Then Corey Andrews reviews William E Paden’s *New Patterns for Comparative Religion: Passages to an Evolutionary Perspective* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). Shai Feraro reviews *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Femininities in Western Esotericism*, by Manon Hedenborg White (Oxford University Press, 2019). We then have Bernd-Christian Otto who reviews Shai Feraro and Ethan Doyle White (eds), *Magic and Witchery in the Modern West: Celebrating the Twentieth Anniversary of “The Triumph of the Moon”* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Misha Kakabadze reviews *Talk-*

ing to the Gods: Occultism in the Work of W.B. Yeats, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, and Dion Fortune, by Susan Johnston Graf (University of New York Press, 2015). Finally, we have W. Michael Ashcraft who reviews *Latter-day Screens: Gender, Sexuality & Mediated Mormonism*, by Brenda R. Weber (Duke University Press, 2019).