



WUHAN JOURNAL OF CULTIC STUDIES



Volume 2, Issue 1

SEPTEMBER 30, 2022

PUBLISHED BY ACADEMIC PUBLISHING FOR WUHAN UNIVERSITY
2040 S. Alma School Rd. Suite 1-182, Chandler AZ 85286

BOOK REVIEWS

Donald L. Westbrook, *L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Elements, 2022); 75 pp.; ISBN: 9781009032001; RRP eBook ?

Keywords: Scientology; Bridge to Total Freedom; L. Ron Hubbard; Scientology Studies

The Cambridge Element series, like Oxford University Press Very Short Introductions, are brief, inexpensive, and often highly informative. Donald L. Westbrook has already published an important study of Scientology in the twenty-first century, *Among the Scientologists: History, Theology, and Praxis* (Oxford University Press, 2019), and he is one of the new scholars of the Church of Scientology (CoS) who are changing the whole approach to this most controversial new religion. Founded by L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986) in 1954, CoS gained a reputation for both weirdness and dangerousness. Science fiction was often attributed a major role in the formation of its doctrines, its founder was decried as a “madman,” and the means to which the Church resorted to protect its reputation involved extreme harassment of journalists and critics, and violent control of members (especially of the elite Sea Org group) who wished to leave. Westbrook, in this work, acknowledges that not everything will be covered, but gives major attention to the study of Scientology, a reflective historiographical focus which is a major strength. The section “Scientology Studies: Theory and Practice” reviews all the monographs to date on CoS, and some scholarship in journals and edited volumes. Westbrook shares his relationship with CoS, which led to his PhD research and participant observation in Scientology practices like auditing, the Purification Rundown, and Training Routines.

The central place of Hubbard in the lives of Scientologists is made clear throughout. Westbrook covers Hubbard’s career as a writer, a naval serviceman, an explorer, and the deviser of the “Bridge to Total Freedom,” which he describes as “a distinct spiritual path to the states of Clear and OT” (pp. 16-17). Westbrook’s perspective is grounded in the beliefs and practices of everyday Scientologists, and he warns against Hubbard being viewed as a deity, and rejects faith-language, emphasising Scientology’s sacred scientific language of knowledge, technology, and workability. The discussion of “L. Ron Hubbard Landmark Site” (p. 19) is fascinating, as little attention has been paid to the devotional practices of CoS members. These include homes in which he lived, teaching spaces, sites linked to Dianetics (the precursor of Scientology), the various state headquarters of the developing Church, and buildings in England (such as Saint Hill Manor in East Grinstead). Westbrook discusses the Bridge to Total Freedom as a “pilgrimage guide” (p. 29), and makes the point that Scientologists walking the Bridge feel themselves to be in Hubbard’s footsteps.

The “Archival Research” section is particularly interesting; Westbrook presents the collections of documents and data that researchers can access when they study the CoS. Some are public and thus unproblematic; others are private (Clearwater, for example, where the Flag Service Organization is based). A range of Californian universities have collections (San Diego State University, UC Santa Barbara, UC Los Angeles, and the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley), and there are other collections connected to scholars, including Hugh B. Urban, Stephen A. Kent, and Westbrook himself. The links between Scientology and other religions are expounded using the work of scholars including Bernadette Rogal-Cellard, Bernard

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Doherty, Marco Frenschkowski, and Massimo Introvigne (among others). There is an extensive glossary of terms associated with the study of CoS (pp. 42-46), a timeline of major events in the history of CoS (Appendix A, pp. 47-55), and a fairly extensive bibliography. This short book is principally directed to those who wish to study Scientology, rather than those who want to know *about* the religion. This is both a strength and a weakness; as a scholar who writes about Scientology I am invested, but there will be no general audience for what is an interesting and valuable short study. It deserves a place in the library of everyone who is interested in Scientology, or in New Religious Movements (NRMs) generally.

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Matthew Francis and Kim Knott (eds), *Minority Religions and Uncertainty*. London: Routledge, 2020; xii, 224 pp.; £36.99. ISBN: 9781032336251.

Keywords: Uncertainty, Minority religion, Response, Ideology, Unpredictability.

The opening chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of uncertainty. Key distinctions are drawn when using the concept of uncertainty, such as, internal, external, open and closed responses (Knott and Francis, 2020, 15). Kim Knott and Matthew Francis continue to discuss the varied scope of what is meant by uncertainty. The opening chapter considers both individual response and group reactions drawing on the scholarship of M. A. Hogg, J. R. Adelman, and R. D. Blagg's 'Religion in the Face of Uncertainty: An Uncertainty-Identity Theory Account of Religiousness' (2010), the late Roy Wallis' *Apocalyptic Trajectories: Millenarianism and Violence in the Contemporary World* (2004) and Catherine Wessinger's *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (2000). In doing so, the reader is introduced to a number of case studies such as Aum Shinrikyo, Shugden, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. This chapter provides an introduction to the complexity of uncertainty, particularly in the context of minority religious movements. As the reader continues to subsequent chapters, they are presented with individual case studies all situated within the context of uncertainty. The reader is continuously reminded of the complexity of the concept of uncertainty not only in the ways in which groups respond to structural uncertainty but also the complexity of choice which members are presented with. For instance, David Barrett (2020) builds on Rodney Starke and Roger Finke's *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (2000), which expounds rational choice theory, arguing that members of the Worldwide Church are faced with innumerable choices when faced with internal conflict which leads to schisms within the organization. When taking into consideration individual uncertainty the concept is problematized.

The majority of the case studies referred to in the book are religious or spiritual; however, there are examples of non-religious groups. Notably, Francis Stewart's (2020) work on the punk movement and Graham Macklin's (2020) analysis of British fascism after World War II. The analysis of these non-religious groups provides a juxtaposed viewpoint for comparison. Themes of uncertainty can be seen in both categorizations, as they are both considered to be on the periphery of the norm and so their responses are often opposed to the majority. This external opposition faced by minority groups often ebb and flow as norms, values and restrictions change, and adapt to contemporary time periods. These may be governmental opposition as is the case for Scientology. Martin Weightmans's contribution is particularly interesting due to the insider perspective he is able to offer. Weightman notes the extended period of time which Scientology has had to oppose governmental repression explaining that it took over 30 years to achieve full religious status. Lucia Ardovini offers a similar account referring to The Muslim Brotherhood's response to persecution. At the time a 'mostly religious movement' turned 'into a violent resistance entity' which as Ardovini (p. 47) suggests is 'a reaction that is common to many groups in times of persecution and repression' for many minority groups. It is not just external pressures which minority groups experiences. Internal struggles may also be a source of uncertainty. The issue of succession of significant figures within these groups is a shared problem. Whether this presents ideological, theological,

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or doctrinal transformations, minority religious groups must respond which in some cases creates schisms and breakaway groups. A key takeaway from the array of case studies is the cyclical nature of response to uncertainty.

Each group's history demonstrates periods of stability followed by disequilibrium and renewal. This problem is exhibited most significantly in Angela Burt's examination of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in which she argues that the group had to undergo a 'course of reform, renewal and sustainability' (p. 86) in the time after Bhaktivedanta Swami's death. A similar problem faced The Muslim Brotherhood when Anwar Sadat was assassinated, as his successor Hosni Mubarak represented a shift in both leadership and political governance. Although there are commonalities between all minority groups (religious or not) each of the case studies must also be situated within their own contextual landscape. The volume coherently explores how external pressures effect the experience of the religious and non-religious movements. For example, Erica Baffelli's work on new religious movements in Japan analyses the impact of the media on the sustainability of groups such as Tensho Ko tai Jingu Kyo and Jiu. Comparatively, Antony Fiscella's chapter on colonial dissonance demonstrates how different organizational responses to uncertainty have unanticipated consequences.

The book is comprehensive in the case studies used but the timely nature of publication is also worth note. In a globalized society characterized by flux and insecurity the volume provides an opportune analysis on the effect of uncertainty of minority religions. The analysis given by the various authors is not necessarily restricted to minority religions and therefore presents opportunities for application to well established religious and non-religious ideologues. The volume encompasses range of interconnected disciplines. A key strength of the book is the breadth of knowledge that is culminated which considers psychological and sociological and responses to uncertainty. For example, from a social psychological standpoint Hogg et al. assert that 'people turn to religion when times are uncertain or when they feel uncertain about themselves' and their worldviews whereas by adopting a sociological viewpoint, uncertainty arises from time of social change.

The book uses examples from mainly group responses the uncertainty. Of course, this encompasses individual differences but there are few examples of analysis at an individual level. A possible avenue for further enquiry may focus on the individual experiences of those undergoing uncertainty. Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, in 'Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality' (2013) have called for scholarly focus on the social construction of new age spirituality. This call can be applied to minority religion and by adopting a different theoretical standpoint, for example an ethnographic or social constructivist approach, future research may be able to further unpick how uncertainty expresses itself in behavior.

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Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, Siv Ellen Kraft and James R. Lewis (eds), *New Age in Norway*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2017, ix- 306, ISBN: 9781781794166.

Keywords: New Age, Spirituality, Consumerism, Norway, Mediatization.

New Age in Norway begins with a comprehensive count for the history of New Age spirituality in Norway which Gilhus, Kraft and Lewis suggest is reflective of the spiritual landscape in Scandinavia. This volume brings together a collection of case studies which contribute to a growing scholarship which Steven Sutcliffe and Ingvild Gilhus defined as third wave research in their book *New Age Spirituality Spirituality Rethinking Religion* (2013). In the article “Category Formation and the History of ‘New Age’” Steven Sutcliffe (2003, p. 7) asserts that future enquiry should “take seriously the theoretical potential of New Age for general studies of religion.” Gilhus, Kraft and Lewis have taken up this challenge. The goal of the collection is twofold, to extend the reach of Norwegian scholarship to an international audience, and to contribute to the development of third wave studies. The volume is successful in achieving both of these aims. The reader is well-informed about a variety of case studies which provide different conceptual offerings on New Age spirituality. The volume offers a comprehensive collection of case studies which when brought together provide a vivid description of New Age offerings in Norway. For example, Bengt-Ove Andreassen’s analysis of the incorporation of New Age ideas in the RE curriculum reflects the continuing influence of New Age ideas in Norwegian society. Comparatively, Ingvild Saelid Gilhus’s chapter discusses the relationship between New Age spirituality, secularization, and re-enchantment. Gilhus conceptualises the relationship by using angels as a metaphor. Drawing on Gregor Ahn’s term ‘Religiöse Grenzgänger’ in *Engel* (1999), Gilhus argues that ‘contemporary angels cross the borders between Lutheran Christianity, popular religion and New Age’ which reflect a changing engagement with traditional monotheism (p. 154). She concludes that the contestation of the concept of angels ‘implies that a monotheistic religious approach is giving way to a more polytheistic approach’ and a growing spiritual milieu (p. 154).

The current landscape of New Age spirituality in Norway is characterized by choice, with the consumer having a multitude of options on offer. This is demonstrated particularly in Anne Kalvig’s chapter “Contemporary Spiritualism in Norway: Faith Assemblies and Market Products”. She describes the abundance of groups that offer alternative services. A distinction between spiritualism and spiritism is made, and Kalvig situates the concepts in the Norwegian context which is a key strength of the chapter. She discusses the flourishing panorama of concepts ranging from ‘psychic telephone lines’ to ‘spiritualist real life meetings’ counterparted by a thriving community of ‘online healing and mediumship’ (p. 200). As with many aspects of society, choice and competition has increased, which has been accelerated by the process of globalization leading to a consumer-driven market. Gilhus and Kraft comment on this, making reference to this in the annual alternative spirituality fairs on offer in Norway. This is not a new phenomenon, but started in the early 1970’s and gained traction from the 1980’s onwards. For example, Asbjørn Dyrendal’s chapter “New Age and Norwegian ‘Conspirituality’” explores ideas of conspiracism and spirituality melding in Norway. He explores how conspiracy theories arise as cultural populist discourses in response to a variety

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of reasons. David G. Robertson's "Conspiracy Narratives as Response to Uncertainty in Minority Religions" (2020) builds on this further.

A commonality throughout all case studies is the idea that New Age spirituality is growing and therefore requires a varied, systematic engagement. The book provides a sense that new age spirituality is 'everywhere' in that it occupies the spaces between national and domestic domains. As previously stated, the scholarship is expanding and continues to develop as researchers scratch the surface of how, why, and where New Age permeates society. In Jonathan Z. Smith's chapter "Here, there and anywhere" (2003) he adopts a spatial model of religion which speaks to the pervasive nature of New Age spirituality. In turn, Christian discourse on angels, and more widely on the increasing spiritual milieu, has had to realign itself to meet the needs of contemporary believers. The lines between Christianity, secularization, and re-enchantment have become blurred in a religious and non-religious landscape of choice.

A key takeaway from the volume is that New Age spirituality has become increasingly mediatized. Within a contemporary context, New Age spirituality has diversified and adopted alternative forms to meet the demands of an increasingly demanding consumer. New Age spirituality not only reflects a changing attitude to religious and spiritual engagement but is also indicative of a changing attitude from counterculture to consumption. In James R. Lewis and Oscar-Torjus Utaaker's chapter "Bumper Car Ride Through a Maze of Spiritual Trips" the authors tackle what they define as a "dismissive economic reductionism" which is now associated with New Age spiritualities inking towards consumption (p. 247). Instead, they suggest that researchers should adopt a position that takes into account that the choices individuals make are laden with value and meaning. The choices are made in interconnected web of other possibilities which are molded by a plethora of factors. A strength of this collection lies in its highlighting of connectivity. Rather than viewing New Age spirituality as reductionist, the volume interprets the growth of New Age spirituality as a reflection of how individuals can join, consume, and replace their spiritual identity as they deem fit. Finally, Gilhus, Kraft and Lewis are effective in signposting readers and researchers to the previous pitfalls in previous literature and in turn influencing future enquiry. In doing so, this book further strengthens efforts to achieve a comprehensive third wave New Age study. What is clear is that New Age spirituality is a growing field in Norway; this volume provides a broad introduction to scholarship on the topic and in turn is a strong foundation for future research.

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