

## Book Reviews

**Siv Ellen Kraft, Trude Fonneland and James R. Lewis (eds):** *Nordic Neoshamanisms*. New York: Palgrave, 2015, 270pp.

This book is set against the backdrop of colonialism throughout the Nordic countries and, in the case of Norway during the Second World War, the destruction of Lapland. Placing these events in the study's background is effective because it gives significance to how a combination of these forces has been instrumental in the loss of Sami culture and religion (shamanism), a topic that is paramount in the context of scholarly discourse.

The book contains chapters by the following: Bente Gullveig Alver, Cato Christensen, Trude Fonneland, Olav Demant Jakobsen, Anne Kalvig, Siv Ellen Kraft, James R. Lewis, Stein R. Mathisen, and Torun Selberg – scholars and editors either from, or who live and work in, Norway. Henno Erikson Parks, however, lives in Finland and is engaged in the study of shamanism in Estonia.

Because the book is mainly concerned with the study of Sami shamanism, the starting point of the analysis is pre-Christian religion, which is discussed in the shadow of Norse traditions and dominant Norwegian society, where both cultures are investigated in the context of what has been referred to as Nordic Neoshamanism. From within these traditions a colourful, highly informative, and important network of the study of both Sami

and Nordic religion and New Age Spirituality has emerged, which introduces new information, contexts, and worldviews to the study of Sami shamanism.

It may be argued that what makes these new contexts of particular interest in relation to the study of Sami shamanism in the Nordic countries is the core themes that are overwhelmingly evident within the literature. The first discussed in these works are the discourses concerning the background to the study presented by Olav Hammer and Trude Fonneland. These scholars address the nature of the issues arising in relation to shamanism in Sami pre-Christian religion and its ties with an ancient hunting culture, contrasted with New Age landscapes and cross-cultural imports, and what this means for identity and ethnicity. The second theme, addressed by Merete Demant Jakobsen, examines the ethics involved in shamanic training and teaching and the ways in which these New Age practices have been imported into Fennoscandia and have influenced various branches of shamanic healing and worldviews.

One of the most interesting and comprehensive discussions focuses on the presentation of the life stories and profiles of female *noaidi* (shamans) through the works of Bente Gullveig Alver and Anne Kalvig. In contrast to historical data, the practice of shamanism amongst the Sami of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in sources compiled by male priests throughout Lapland, demonstrates

that the phenomenon is portrayed as a largely male institution. The new research therefore overturns these ancient stereotypes and confirms the importance of demonstrating that the study of post-colonial Sami culture reveals a series of distinct insights and an understanding of the position of woman as healers, mediums, and tradition-bearers in contemporary society. Torunn Selberg discusses the transition of shamanism from the historical hunting cultures of the Siberian tundra to western towns and cities. She thus highlights the transition from contact with the spiritual worlds through prehistoric religion and sacrificial traditions to communication with these worlds through modern day practices, and the important role these play in the link between the shaman and psychology in relation to female spirituality and indigenous culture. Similarly, the scholarly works of Henno Erikson Parks examine the remnants of female witchcraft in a case study of shamanism in Estonia against the backdrop of Soviet rule in the Baltic States, and the important role historical literature plays in the search for meaning and identity in this context.

In contrast to what is noted above, there are also points of contention outlined in the chapter by James R. Lewis, who, like other scholars, examines the literature and the influence of the American anthropologists Michael Harner and Carlos Castaneda, as well as the Sami shaman Ailo Gaup, concerning the evolution of neoshamanic practices and cross-cultural influences such as those from Native American

spirituality. Lewis adeptly describes the attitudes and interpretations from within the American movement and its influence on Sami shamanism. For example, he shows that religion for the Sami has been a primary ethnic marker of culture and identity, and he therefore examines the impacts of New Age spiritual practices in various ways to see if they contribute to further division and ambiguity when viewed within a post-colonial setting.

Cato Christensen skilfully analyses the important role Sami religion plays as it is presented in films and media in relation to ethnicity, identity, and the forwarding of traditional knowledge via Sami shamanism as the Sami themselves present it, and what this means in terms of cultural continuity and originality. Stein R. Mathisen brings to light the often-forgotten legacy of the witchcraft trials in Norway and offers a detailed examination of the important role archived material such as ritual artefacts plays in the reconstruction of Sami shamanism in the tourist industry. His research brings into focus important questions concerning the continued misrepresentation of Sami culture in relation to the painful history of the persecution of the Sami *noaidi*, museum collections, and the development of tourism. He also examines how the symbolism of the ancient drums continues to be exploited, not unlike the priests and missionaries who sought to de-contextualise Sami religion and culture during the witchcraft persecutions of the 17th century.

A second chapter by Trude Fonneland brings a new dimension to research into Sami shamanism and the visibility of the revival movement in Northern Norway as encountered in an annual mind, body, and spirit festival called *Isogaisa*, where shamans from all over the world meet. Her analysis is set against the backdrop of colonialism and the re-emergence of shamanism in Norway, where it is now recognised as an official religion. She also outlines how the organisers see shamanism as a countercultural force in relation to Christianity, and describes the festival events, which provide various experiences for visitors and enable a sense of community and continuity of tradition.

Siv Ellen Kraft examines the fundamental role music plays in the re-emergence of the Sami *joik* through the work of Mari Boine in Indigeneity and identity. The merit of Kraft's work is that she analyses the effects of trance and altered states, the role and function of magic in shamanism, and the impact this has on audiences.

The only error I have found is made by Trude Fonneland, who in her discussion of the evolving shamanic movement in Norway and one of its key organisations, namely, the Shamanic Association, describes representative shaman Franck White Cougar as non-Sami (p. 43). To clarify: Franck is of Sami ancestry, and I understand this error has been corrected in more recent texts.

The quality and importance of this book for the study of Nordic

religion and Religious Studies in general may be summarised as follows: this is the first comprehensive contribution to ground its study of Sami religion in both a historical and modern context, thus capturing what can be called the 'Revival Movement' which is sweeping Northern Norway and the Baltic States.

In each contribution there are important examples of different discourses from Estonia, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the United States of America, which have been woven together to restore culture and identity. The book also captures how similar belief systems are evident in relation to spiritual practices and worldviews in the case of Sami and Native American Spirituality.

What is also important for the scientific study of religion is that personal accounts from different shamans have been given freely, in contrast to the duress suffered by the *noaidi* and healers during the colonial period between the 17th and 19th centuries. This freedom, it can be argued, plays a fundamental role in the contribution that the study of religion, tradition, nature worship, and the global network of shamanism makes to our understanding of this new religious domination in Norway and the re-emergence of shamanism in the Western world.

**Francis Joy,**

University of Lapland, Finland

FRANCIS JOY is a PhD Candidate at the University of Lapland Faculty of Art and Design, and researcher with the Sami Indigenous Research Team at the Arctic Centre. E-mail: francis.joy@ulapland.fi

**Tuomas Martikainen and François Gauthier (eds):** *Religion in the Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 248pp.

**François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (eds):** *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 250pp.

How is religion entangled with politics and economy in a globalised world? How can one explain the causes and outcomes of these entanglements? The answers to these questions are of necessity as varied and complex as the studied phenomena themselves. To orientate oneself in this landscape, where changing relationships between religion, state, and economy produce novel and at times even surprising outcomes, some sort of road map is desirable. To this end, the complementary volumes of *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society*, edited by François Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen, constitute an excellent guide.

'We live in the age of neoliberalism' is the opening statement of *Religion in the Neoliberal Age*, which few would contest. In a world seriously threatened with economic collapse neoliberal thinking seems to govern different if not all aspects of social life. The editors remind us, however, that the dominance of this 'finance and consumer-capitalist' ethos is not a new phenomenon but has developed in the last three

decades, alongside the process of globalisation. What we see before our eyes is the reaping of this development's fruit.

It is not only the world economy that is in danger of hitting rock bottom. Traditional religion, especially in Europe, has suffered a serious blow: relations between the state and Christian churches have weakened; the media increasingly governs the way people see the world; and since the 1960s a growing number of non-Christian religions have challenged the status and influence the churches once had. At the same time religions have gained a new visibility and importance in the post-Cold War world and in post-colonial geopolitics, heightened after 9/11. In addition, alternative spiritualities are growing in popularity, and in the process Weberian disenchantment is giving way to a religious re-enchantment. In the study of religion a favourite paradigm to explain the prospects of traditional religion has been the theory of secularisation in its various forms. However, Gauthier and Martikainen argue that in a globalising world the secularisation thesis is insufficient. Nor do they subscribe to the Rational Choice Theory, which explains the religious field in terms of utilitarian-minded actors following the logics of the marketplace economy. Instead of looking at the effects of socio-economic change as a one-way street where religion is simply a target, these books edited by Gauthier and Martikainen aim

at eliciting the various dialectical processes that take place between religion and state/society/economy.

The starting point of the above-mentioned two volumes is explained in the Preface of *Religion in Consumer Society*. The editors write:

In brief, our key thesis is that the twin forces of neoliberalism and consumerism are penetrating and transforming the 'religions' world-wide, though in locally embedded forms. [...] It should be well understood that these two volumes can be taken together as interpreting a single, complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. (p. xv)

Due to this focus on a 'single phenomenon', there is inevitably a considerable overlap between the two volumes; consumerism and neoliberalism intermingle and so do both books' articles. At the same time these volumes are constructed around somewhat different perspectives so that one can read them independently, and they certainly also make interesting reading as individual works. In what follows, however, I will discuss them interchangeably.

The focus of *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* is on the institutional issues where management, regulation, governance, and securitisation constitute some key processes. Eleven articles are divided into two parts, of which the first deals with religions in the new political economy and the second with the political governance of religion. *Religion in Consumer So-*

*ciety* continues with similar themes but focuses more clearly on consumerism and how religions operate in societies where consumerism is a culturally and socially dominant ethos. This volume is also divided into two parts: the first examines 'changing world religions', while the second examines 'commoditised spiritualities'.

The current political economy, infused as it is with consumerism, offers challenges but also opportunities for both well-established churches and other forms of spirituality. With respect to the former Schlamelcher and Gray (*Religion in the Neoliberal Age*) and Petterson (*Religion in Consumer Society*) give examples of the new roles that the German Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland, and the Lutheran Church of Sweden have acquired. When church membership declines and people are distanced from the church, mainstream churches need to find new ways of attracting people. People are seen increasingly as a consumerist clientele who are enticed to church by new services and novel spaces. In other words, churches need to brand their functions in competing with each other to attract people to their folds. Some are more successful than others.

*Religion in Consumer Society* offers many other examples of the entanglements of religion with consumerism, such as American megachurches (Ellingson), Catholic monasticism (Palmisano), Judaism

(Niculescu), and Buddhism (McKenzie). For example, megachurches in the USA work on 'the cult of the individual' and 'sacralise consumerism' to appeal to their participants and constitute a new type of congregation. In the process they drastically influence the field of American Protestantism as a whole.

With respect to the political governance of religion churches can also find, and be given, new social roles in a multicultural society. For example, in Ireland the Catholic Church acts as an instrument of the government in the project of immigrant integration and, in the process, aims at gaining new legitimacy in Irish society, its reputation having been badly damaged by serious scandals. Hackworth (*Religion in Consumer Society*) goes as far as to use the term 'religious neoliberalism' with respect to the uneasy alliance between neoliberals and religious fundamentalists in the United States. It is exactly these kinds of example that secularisation theories fail to elicit or explain.

Awareness of neoliberal economy and politics draws attention to changes happening within churches and the effects that these changes have on the role of faith-based organisations in contemporary society. However, these changes concern not only well-established churches and religions, or 'world religions' as they are called in *Religion in Consumer Society*, but also have an effect on other forms of spirituality, as exemplified in the second part of the above-mentioned

volume. Whether 'new' or 'old', religious traditions are compelled to act in line with the market economy and its consumerist ethos. At the same time one should not be completely overwhelmed by the consumerist lens. In her article on Glastonbury as a historical pilgrimage site and locus of New Age spirituality Bowman draws attention to the self-understanding of the 'spiritual entrepreneurs' who regard their work for this religious centre as 'their own spiritual path, as an expression of their spiritual values and as being of service to the spiritual value of Glastonbury' (p. 223).

In addition to religion the effects of neoliberalism are also felt in other areas of state and society. Surprisingly, perhaps, not even the legal sphere has remained untouched by the market ideology, as Chagnon and Gauthier, as well as Beaman, demonstrate in *Religion in the Neoliberal Age*. Using Canada as an example, they demonstrate that the ethos of radical individualism and understanding social reality and personal aspirations purely in economic terms has infiltrated the definition of justice and the practice of law.

Another phenomenon that the secularisation theories fail to address is the state's need to manage or govern religions. The reason for this is highlighted by Spickard (*Religion in the Neoliberal Age*), who draws attention to a current trend whereby religions to a large extent tend to gain visibility as conserva-

tive, authoritarian, intolerant, and even violent traditions and, in the process, have lost their credibility as legitimate critics of current society and politics. In the face of this development, 'states have shown a growing interest in regulating religions in order to suppress or promote certain forms of religious behaviour', as Martikainen notes in the same volume (p. 129). These measures of regulation can take many forms, such as the securitisation or promotion of dialogue between the adherents of different religions. Thus, unwanted religious activism is controlled, for example, by counter-terrorism laws, or by using religions as instruments for the management of social and economic risk. In other words, religions play a dual role both as targets and allies of securitisation policies.

*Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society* are weighty and inspiring reading due to their use of very rich empirical material from Europe and North America. In addition to presenting interesting empirical observations, many of the articles take part in a more theoretical discussion about the role and social place of religion. For the more theoretically oriented reader it is the introductions that offer the most thought-provoking reading. These introductions will be basic reading for anyone who seeks to be familiar with what is happening in the sociological study of contemporary religion. It is impossible here to go into detail concerning

the sophisticated argumentations of these introductions. I will therefore select one general theme that seems to be an underlying thought in both volumes.

Neoliberalism and consumerism have been heavily criticised. Against this, Gauthier and Martikainen maintain that 'a priori normative analytics' does not serve research's aim of grasping the diversity of religious phenomena in a 'globalized, hypermediatized political and cultural economy'. In their view avoiding a normative standpoint is also a necessity for working towards alternative theories concerning these phenomena. Doubtless, this would be a wise decision if one wanted to produce a multifaceted analysis of the complex processes of the contemporary world, as both volumes certainly do. At the same time it is difficult to turn a blind eye to the devastating effects of neoliberal politics and economics on the world at large. Where globalisation is concerned, it is obvious that free movement across borders and affluent, consumerist lifestyles are the privilege of but a few.

As Spickard notes (*Religion in the Neoliberal Age*), neoliberal politics 'have done tremendous damage to poor people around the world' (p. 47). He also draws attention to the annual report of the OECD, which shows that in different countries economic inequality has grown in the last thirty years of neoliberalism's hay day. In light of these observations neoliberalism seems largely to serve the interests of the world's wealthiest countries and the most

privileged segments of individual societies. Observations such as these make one very uneasy about claims to neutrality.

In research that aims at analysis instead of evaluation, as is the case with Gauthier and Martikainen, one could well turn the negative side-effects of neoliberalism into research questions and investigate how different religious institutions and actors support or critique neoliberal politics and economy. Moreover, one cannot avoid asking how the picture would change if, instead of western countries, the volumes had also covered cases from Africa and Asia. This might be a second step: to look at and test the observation and arguments provided by *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society* in a more global context.

The above-mentioned reservations notwithstanding, one can only congratulate Gauthier and Martikainen for their innovative and outstanding work in *Religion in the Neoliberal Age* and *Religion in Consumer Society*. These two volumes offer an excellent springboard for further empirical research and novel theory-making in the sociology of religion.

**Tuula Sakaranaho**

University of Helsinki, Finland

TUULA SAKARANAHO is Professor of the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki.  
E-mail: tuula.sakaranaho@helsinki.fi



**Lori G. Beaman and Steven Tomlins (eds):** *Atheist Identities: Spaces and Social Contexts*. Cham: Springer, 2015, 219pp.

Atheists, the non-religious, and the religiously unaffiliated have become a popular research topic in many disciplines and subject areas, including religious studies. *Atheist Identities*, edited by Lori Beaman and Steven Tomlins, is the second volume in the series *Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies*. It deals with questions related to atheist identities, particularly in the North Atlantic, meaning, in this case, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. It consists of eleven chapters and the editors' introduction. The contributors are in various stages of their careers, consisting of PhD students, established scholars, and emeritus professors. The volume's origin lies in a workshop held in Ottawa in 2012.

The starting point of the volume is the observation that the terms used in studying atheist (and closely related) identities are messy. However, the task is not to get rid of this messiness if the object of study is a heterogeneous field with people carrying multiple and situational identity tags, but to make sense of the complexities of the field of study. The volume does this by organising various approaches and focusing on three levels: social identities, group identities, and individual identities. In practice, this means studying the constructions and negotiations

of atheist identities in the public sphere, examining atheist activist organisations, and analysing atheism as an individual's self-identity within and without activist organisations. I find this three-level approach very useful analytically.

Although this would be an adequate framework for a coherent and relevant volume, the editors add to it the themes of multiculturalism, regulation, and reasonable accommodation (including questions such as 'Does multiculturalism include atheist identities?') This part works well in some chapters, but it is not explicitly addressed by most. It seems to me that this is a link between atheist identities – a relevant topic in itself – and the series highlights regulation, governance, and religious freedom as its key words.

In addition to data that is already in the public sphere the chapters utilise ethnographic fieldwork and participant observations, interviews, and surveys, thus guaranteeing a multifaceted examination of the topic. The individual chapters themselves provide relevant findings, but together they provide an opportunity for cross-national and cross-cultural comparison. Two results are noteworthy. First, as the editors suggest, 'A defining difference remains between the more hostile atmosphere towards atheists in the United States and the much more indifferent/accepting climate in Canada and the United Kingdom' (p. 5). This is interesting, because it argues that neighbouring countries can have very different 'climates'

for atheism and that geographically distant countries can resemble each other in this respect. Second, the volume's findings argue for the significance of nation-specific explorations of atheism, rather than universally applicable generalisations. This is concomitant with David Martin's take on the secularisation debate. As he writes in *The Future of Christianity* (Ashgate, 2011, p. 7), 'the theory of secularization [...] is profoundly inflected by particular histories, which in the modern period are national histories qualified in a minor or major way by regional variations'. Martin's argument is not referenced in *Atheist Identities*, but on the basis of findings of individual chapters it can be suggested that the same insight applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the study of atheism.

Rather than summarising and evaluating each chapter deeply, I shall limit myself to a couple of comments, some appreciative and some critical. William A. Stahl's overview of the Canadian religious context – a chapter driven by Charles Taylor's insights – is followed by Lori Beaman's superb chapter on atheist involvement in legal cases. With two examples she argues convincingly that ostensibly religious symbols such as a cross located in the classroom are re-articulated as cultural and national symbols with heritage-value in selected present day nation-states, thus representing atheists as people who are not only irreligious but against the dominant values of society more generally. One of the cases concerns Italy and

the European Court, thus departing from the volume's geographical focus, but it is a chapter worth reading.

Stephen LeDrew's chapter persuades us to think of the history and current forms of atheism in terms of binaries such as 'scientific atheism' and 'humanistic atheism', 'confrontation' and 'accommodation', 'individualism' and 'social justice'. These are useful ideal-types in simplifying the complexities of historical and current positions, particularly in American atheist discourse. They illustrate the so-called 'New Atheism', which highlights science, confrontation, and individualism, but I am unsure whether the other halves of the binaries form a clear-cut whole. Furthermore, it is possible to find well-known public intellectuals who could be seen as representing both scientific and humanistic atheism, such as A. C. Grayling.

Altogether five chapters focus on atheist or non-religious organisations of various kinds. Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith write about organised secularist rituals in the United States, while Spencer Bullivant analyses his fieldwork experience in the United States at a non-religious summer camp called Camp Quest. Steven Tomlins and Christopher Cotter explore atheist university clubs in Ottawa and Edinburgh respectively, while Lorna Mumford focuses on London's non-religious meeting groups. These are all relevant recent case studies of organisations that received little scholarly attention a decade ago.

Peter Beyer traces what he calls the 'punctuated continuum' of identities among young immigrants in Canada and demonstrates that it might be wiser to talk about 'a continuum of identities ranging from one socially operative category to another – here atheism and religion – than of an arrangement of people into a delimited set of categories, whether two or more' (p. 139). This insight is implicitly present in many chapters of this volume, including Amarnath Amarasingam's study of Sri Lankan Tamil youth in Canada, which demonstrates nicely how religious identification can mean ethnic and cultural belonging rather than a belief-position. However, as it fails to address atheist identities explicitly, it fits less well with the rest of this volume than the other chapters.

The volume concludes with Ryan Cragun's survey analysis of atheists in the United States. It confirms what is already known – that atheists are typically young, white, unmarried (partly because of their age), liberal, and well-educated men. Cragun also explores the differences between 'New Atheists' and 'other atheists'. Although I consider this approach extremely relevant, the operationalisation of 'New Atheists' is somewhat flawed. Cragun includes in the category all who meet three criteria: (1) those who do not believe in God and life after death; (2) those who agree that evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth; and (3) those who think that the Bible is a book written by men and is not the word

of God. It is unsurprising that these extremely broad criteria result in the conclusion that 80% of all atheists are considered 'New Atheists'. I am convinced that this percentage encompasses such a diverse group of people – not to mention their heterogeneous attitudes towards Dawkins and other well-known so-called 'New Atheists' – that narrower criteria would have been appropriate.

Finally, I wish to raise two minor points that apply to the whole volume. First, the editors define atheism in the introduction as '*the belief that there is no God, no gods, no Goddess, and no goddesses*' (p. 4, emphasis original). I have no quarrel with this definition, but if the objective of the volume is to study atheist identities by highlighting how people understand what their atheism consists of, what it entails, and which practices are appropriate for it, it is not clear to me why an analytical definition of atheism is preferred to people's self-identification. Many chapters would be good if they defined their scope of study with a focus on people identifying as atheists or who are active in organisations that apply the term.

Second, although the volume focuses on North America and the United Kingdom, it could have included more references to other areas. I am mainly thinking of continental Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Nordic countries. For example, a special issue of *Approaching Religion* (1/2012), *The New Visibility of Atheism in Europe*,

which deals with such areas as well as the United Kingdom, and offers a comparison between Scandinavia and the United States, is not utilised (although there is a passing reference to one of its articles in the thematic issue). The issue was published on open access six months before the meeting that initiated this volume, so it would have been quite easy to contextualise the findings from North America and the United Kingdom more strongly in relation to previously published studies.

Despite these few critical comments, this volume is indispensable for anyone wishing to contribute to the study of atheist identities in the contemporary world. Its individual chapters offer useful case studies and I assume that many readers will want to read the whole volume, because most of the contributions are so strongly related. It also demonstrates that the topic must be addressed on at least three levels – the social, the group, and the individual – and that the kind of identity people have is strongly dependent on their various national histories.

**Teemu Taira**

University of Helsinki, Finland

TEEMU TAIRA is Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions, University of Helsinki.  
E-mail: teemu.taira@helsinki.fi

**Tomáš Bubík and Henryk Hoffmann (eds):** *Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Open: The Academic Study of Religion in Eastern Europe*. Leiden, Brill, 2015, xviii+320pp.

This book is the ultimate result of an international grant project entitled 'Development of the Study of Religions in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th Century', supported by the Czech Science Foundation. Participants in the project were charged with undertaking a historical and systematic analysis of the academic study of religion in their own countries. The overall objective was to provide the international community of scholars of religion with the first new, comprehensive treatise on the development of 'Religious Studies' in this region of Europe in the English language. 'Our fundamental hypothesis [for the project],' the editors note, 'is that the field, as a constituent of the humanities, is specifically inclined to idealization, perhaps even more so than any other discipline' (p. x), and the 'main contribution of the book', they maintain, will 'test whether and to what extent the Study of Religions has such a proclivity to chronic idealization', especially, but not only, under Communist regimes (p. x). Individual national studies in this volume include, in order, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, and Russia.

In 'The Czech Journey to the Academic Study of Religion', subtitled 'From the Critique of Religion

to its Study', Tomáš Bubík provides a brief survey of the historical and cultural conditions that impacted the development of the academic study of religion as a backdrop to its decline during the Communist era after 1948. By 1954, he shows, scientific atheism had become the primary theoretical approach to understanding religion, replacing the academic study of religion with anti-church and anti-religious propaganda (p. 31). A scholarly approach re-emerged in the Republic after the dissolution of the Institute of Scientific Atheism, an approach 'characterized by the most unbiased standpoint possible', as Bubík puts it, 'even if the truly objective standpoint cannot be reached' (p. 46). This new, scientific approach to understanding and explaining religious phenomena and religions is now anchored in such institutions as university departments, in journals for publication of academic research on religions, and in academic societies that support research in this field nationally and internationally.

David Václavík provides an analysis of the development of the study of religion in Slovakia, indicating the problems for the field given that a Slovakian national identity emerged only in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and given the loss of independent statehood for Slovakia after World War II. The domination of the Marxist scientific worldview after 1948, moreover, had a significant negative impact on the study of religions in that country. It is only with the demise of the Slovakian Institute of Scientific Atheism after

1989, he points out, that interest in the academic study of religion was particularly influenced by the social sciences, especially psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

In his research on the study of religions in Poland Henryk Hoffmann provides a summary of its development from the nineteenth century to the present. Hoffmann shows that there was clearly a 'secularist current' in the field that lasted until 1918 and that the interwar period was dominated by a diffusionist 'cultural historical method' intent on demonstrating an 'ur-cultural monotheism'. No department or institute of scientific atheism, he points out, was ever established in Poland during the Communist period, and the study of religions attained academic recognition in the 1970s. As for the present status of the field, he writes: 'Despite many difficulties initially associated with the lack of state, and later because of many complications of [a] political and ideological nature, Polish study of religions developed gradually, in accord with its international development.' (p. 118)

András Máté-Tóth and Csaba Máté Sarnyai provide an overview of the study of religion in Hungary by way of brief biographies and summaries of the views of the field's most representative influential scholars, and supply an overview of its most significant publications. They see the development as having occurred in four distinct periods: a period of liberal thought from 1860 to 1920; a nationalist period from 1920 to 1950; a period of open hostility to the field under the Communist regime from

1950 to 1990; and what they call a pluralist period from 1990 to the present. They maintain that scholars in Hungary were always open to the scholarship of highly respected international colleagues in the field throughout the atheistic period, indicating/suggesting continuity of the work in Hungary with the study of religion outside Soviet influence.

Ülo Valk and Tarmo Kulmar write: 'The history of Religious Studies as an academic discipline in Estonia has developed over time in three main directions, each primed by specific ideological factors and sometimes also political needs.' (p. 167) These directions include the long history of interest in Christianity, in Oriental Studies, and Indology in the nineteenth century, as well as research into ethnic religions and pre-Christian mythology. They attempt to provide an overall picture of the field in brief accounts of the outstanding scholars who best represented these trends. Their account clearly shows that the internal priorities of the discipline were mostly subordinated to ideological directives (p. 182), although they think the field today is experiencing 'a powerful internationalization process' (p. 197).

Janis Priede focuses his study of the Study of Religions in Latvia on its development in the twentieth century since, as he maintains, '[a]ny attempt to introduce a strict chronological division between the pre-academic and academic study of religion in Latvia is arbitrary' (p. 200). He pays attention, therefore, to the most significant scholars in the field in the twentieth century, especially

those who continued the tradition of 'the study of religion started by philologists, literary scholars, folklore specialists, and Orientalists [...]' (p. 238). The two important strands of study today, he points out, include folk religion and mythology, which had been a significant field after World War I, and, interestingly, the religious ideas to be found in Latvian (and Russian) writers.

Liudmyla Fylypovych and Yuriy Babinov maintain that although it can in some senses be considered 'one of the oldest branches of human knowledge', the study of religion in Ukraine is nevertheless a young discipline (p. 239). Early in the twentieth century research on religions came under strict ideological control and its major task became the propagation of atheistic thinking. Despite that pressure, however, they claim that Ukrainian scholars succeeded in exploring a range of serious questions in the field, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union, moreover, the discipline was renewed. 'Today,' they write, 'Religious Studies coexist in Ukraine in parallel academic and theological modes, which complement each other rather than competing [because the] secularity of academic Religious Studies does not imply hostility towards religions [...]' (p. 256).

In outlining 'Religious Studies' in Russia Ekaterina Elbakyan raises the interesting question as to whether a 'Soviet Religious Studies' ever really existed. Nevertheless, Elbakyan also notes that in the pre-war years Russian scholars were engaged in studying Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and religions of the East such as

Buddhism. This research, however, was largely in support of atheistic propaganda, and especially so from the 1950s to the 1980s. Elbakyan, moreover, points out that '[i]ssues concerning the theory of scientific atheism as well as the question of its exact placement among other social sciences occupied an important position in Soviet research of the time' (p. 291). Tasks listed for future consideration include distinguishing the study of religions from theology (transcendent matters), solidifying its academic character, and integrating it into the broader international framework of religious studies.

These historical reflections on the study of religions in Eastern European countries show that despite difficult political conditions and ideological influences, the Study of Religions, as the editors put it, has 'gradually but steadily moved forward' (p. xv), and has filled in many gaps in understanding the discipline from a global perspective. I think the editors are also justified in claiming that this volume brings into view primary sources of materials related to the study of religion in these countries which is relevant not only in understanding the history of this specific discipline but also of the humanities in general (p. iv).

**Donald Wiebe**

University of Toronto, Canada

DONALD WIEBE is Professor at Trinity College in the University of Toronto, [dwiebe@trinity.utoronto.ca](mailto:dwiebe@trinity.utoronto.ca)

