

Beth Singler and Eileen Barker (eds)

Radical Transformations of Minority Religions

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Reviewed by James T. Richardson, University of Nevada, Reno

The matriarch of New Religion Movement (NRM) studies, Eileen Barker, has done it again with this impressive edited volume. This time, she had the help of Beth Singler, a young scholar whose training and research focus is on digital anthropology, which undergirds her research on newer religions that have a predominantly online presence. The volume is a welcome follow-up to Barker's *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*, which was published in 2013 as part of the well-known *Routledge Inform Series on Minority Religions and Spiritual Movements* that Barker has edited for decades. Included in this volume are seventeen very diverse and informative chapters on some well-known NRMs as well as several obscure ones. The groups and movements included demonstrate the great variety of newer faiths in the contemporary world as well as the changes they are undergoing, a few of which can be called radical. The chapters are from the perspectives of either renowned scholars in the field who discuss theoretical and historical aspects or those who are deeply involved in the changes occurring in their groups of membership.

The introductory chapter by Singler provides an overview of the volume and discusses its theoretical orientation. This chapter is informative and helpful for readers seeking an overall understanding of what the volume contributes to this growing field of study. Various groups, movements, and important themes and considerations are discussed in the subsequent chapters, including Barker's substantial discussion of the ways in which several well-known groups have dealt with child abuse allegations. This insightful and in-depth examination of the different ways in which Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Jesus Fellowship Church responded to these allegations alone makes the volume a worthwhile addition to any NRM scholar's library.

For scholars such as myself who are interested in legal issues surrounding contemporary NRMs and the ways in which these groups manage to survive in sometimes unwelcoming cultural and political climes, the chapter 'Regulating religious diversification: a legal perspective' by Frank Cranmer and Russell Sandberg is very informative. It offers a lengthy historical analysis of matters of religious freedom in the UK, including an examination of Scientology's eventually successful battle to be accepted as a religion and permitted to perform marriages. Moreover, the ways in which important cases from the UK have been addressed by the European Court of Human Rights are also discussed. Legal matters are also examined in other chapters on specific religions, including Bernard Doherty's and Laura Dyason's chapter on the Plymouth Brethren in Australia, who attempted to rebrand themselves to respond to negative publicity received from society. Furthermore, Claire Borowik's chapter on digital revisionism and the *reboot* of The Family is replete with legal considerations as the groups discussed therein often responded to attempts to control them using legal processes. Shanon Shah's fascinating chapter on LGBT Muslim groups offers new insights into little-known developments in Islam, and Eugene V. Gallagher's chapter on how a schism within the Church of Satan led to the establishment of the Temple of Set includes previously unknown information on how and why that split occurred. Andrew Dawson's chapter on the Brazilian movement of Santo Daime updates readers on this now international movement that has led to some dramatic legal challenges and changes in many countries, including the US. Erin

Prophet's chapter, which is built around the theme of *a messenger*, explains the historical ties of the Church Universal and Triumphant to the Theosophical and New Thought traditions, and it discusses changes within this controversial group to which she previously belonged.

There are a number of other chapters of note, including those examining British Paganism as well as Druids and the Gnostic movement in the UK as well. The volume also provides scholarly analyses of some lesser-known groups that are worth learning about, including Jediism, Enlighten Next, and others.

Overall, this volume contains valuable information on a number of groups that are or should be of considerable interest to NRM scholars and those interested in contemporary religious research from around the world. I strongly recommend the volume, and I hope that it is widely distributed.
