

Book Reviews

Christopher P. Scheitle and Roger Finke, *Places of Faith: A Road trip Across America's Religious Landscape* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. x + 254, ISBN 9780199791521 (Pbk).

Places of Faith is a difficult book to categorise. Part field-diary, part travelogue, the book provides a series of vignettes of religious life in the United States. The authors are both established researchers in the field of the sociology of religion, and yet at first glance this publication by Oxford University Press seems like an unusual endeavour. The book is divided into eight chapters, each a slice of the religious diversity that makes up contemporary American religious pluralism. Beginning with black Baptist churches in Memphis Tennessee, and ending in Brooklyn New York, the authors charter both 'fly over country' and American major cities to provide the reader with a very introductory understanding of the major religious denominations of the United States. African American Christianity, Pentecostalism, para-church organisations, Asian American religions (namely Buddhism and Taoism), Mormonism, Lutheranism, Islam, and Judaism, are all given a rough and ready treatment through the lens of the particular church, synagogue, mosque, or temple that the authors happened to visit. Each chapter begins with a history of the movement in question, the 'religious landscape' – essentially an explanation of contemporary trends in the movement – and then a participant observer report on the nature of ritual and religious life within that place of worship. The chapters then conclude with a brief discussion about the role of the religion in the lives of the faithful outside the church. At the end of every chapter, a coda entitled 'From the Road' provides a page long introduction and summary to some more unusual aspect of religious life or a religious institution in the region that has peaked the authors' interests, from the Hare Krishna temple in San Francisco, to a English-speaking Romanian Orthodox Nunnery in Pennsylvania.

Clearly, the work is not intended for an academic audience; it introduces no theory, and much of its content introduces 'basic' and 'introductory' themes in religious life in America (e.g., the prosperity gospels among American mega-churches, or what a 'muezzin' is). While each chapter provides a reference list at the end, there is no referencing throughout the chapters, and as such, any academic seeking further information would be at a loss to find exact sources. I am at something of a loss to suggest who the intended audience is, but I would suggest that this book represents something of a 'socio-religious'

answer to a Lonely Planet guidebook, providing the interested traveller with some tidbits of information that they could use if they happened to be conducting their own road trip across the US, and had an ongoing interest and passion for religious diversity in the American context. While I would hesitate to recommend it for any academic audience, it might be useful for students in the field of studies in religion or sociology to help guide them through the process of creating a fieldwork diary. It would also make for interesting reading for any religiously-minded and intrepid tourist interested in embarking on their own road trip across America's religious landscape.

Simon Theobald
University of Sydney

Mick Brown, *The Spiritual Tourist: A Personal Odyssey Through the Outer Reaches of Belief* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), pp. vi + 310, ISBN 0747542821 (Pbk).

Mick Brown's *The Spiritual Tourist* has a deserved place in the brief list of 'classic' treatments of popular alternative spiritualities. Brown, a British journalist, published *The Spiritual Tourist* in 1998, a mere two years after Wouter Hanegraaff's *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* and Paul Heelas' *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* both appeared. These pioneering studies drew the 'cultic milieu' (as Colin Campbell termed it in 1972) firmly into the academic study of contemporary religion, but both scarcely acknowledged the existence of religious travel (whether pilgrimage, tourism, or general 'seeking' in locations deemed to be particularly rich in tradition or spiritual resources). Much of the spiritual terrain investigated by Brown appears in Heelas and Hanegraaff (for example, the history of Theosophy, channelled messages from enlightened beings, millennial expectations, the veneration of Eastern 'wisdom,' and the fascination with female gurus, living embodiments of the Goddess), but his book is distinguished by its personal tone and deliberately non-academic chronicling of vernacular, lived alternative religiosities.

The Spiritual Tourist opens with Brown's meeting with Benjamin Creme, a London prophet of coming of the 'cosmic Christ' or the Buddha of the end times, Maitreya. This encounter was facilitated by Brown's friend Van Morrison, musician and famed spiritual seeker. Morrison was unimpressed, but Mick Brown responded positively to Creme, whom he describes as "small and

wiry, perhaps sixty years of age, dressed in a white rollneck pullover. His chubby face was framed by an aureole of snow-white hair, giving him the mischievous appearance of a battered cherub” (p. 7). Over the years Brown subscribed to Creme’s magazine, *Share International*, and participated in dozens of conversations with Creme and other seekers like Mr. Patel, a North London pharmacist and devotee of Sai Baba. He read important testimonies, including Parahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) and Narayana Kasturi’s biography of Sai Baba, *Satya Sivam Sundaram* (1980). Brown eventually went on a number of trips to sacred destinations, principally in India, to seek out gurus and spiritual teachers and to test their authenticity through his personal reactions to their teachings.

The book thus becomes a travelogue of ashrams and sadhus, commencing with Sai Baba at Puttaparthi, and encompassing the Spanish-born boy lama Osel of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition at Sera in India, the Indian-born Mother Meera (an avatar or living goddess to her followers) in Thalheim, Germany, and many others. Brown’s book is rick in physical details of the spiritual communities he visits (Chapter 6, ‘Mother, Mother,’ contains a beautiful description of Sri Aurobindo’s ashram in Pondicherry and the utopian settlement of Auroville, several miles out of town, that was built by his closest associate, Mirra Alfassa, known as ‘the Mother.’ Threaded throughout the book are stories of those who put their faith in certain teachers and those who later lost it. The English academic Andrew Harvey (b. Coimbatore, India, in 1952) is the most sustained example; his *Hidden Journey* (1991) tells of his *darshan* with Mother Meera on Christmas Day 1978, but his later *The Return of the Mother* (2000) revealed that he broke with Meera because she wished him to leave his gay lover, and offered him “the choice of either remaining celibate or ... marrying a woman” (p. 181). But Brown’s chief sources are the ordinary spiritual seekers, usually Western and middle class, with whom he travels on India’s rickety buses and overcrowded trains, and who reveal to him their desire for peace, happiness, meaning in life, and knowledge of their selves.

The strongest thread running through *The Spiritual Tourist* is that for every contented believer or devotee who sticks faithfully to his or her guru, there are dozens of seekers who remain reluctant to commit and merely take bites from the spiritual smorgasbord, and dozens who tried the discipline of joining a community and became disillusioned, some moving on to other teachings and others to secular worldviews. Chapter 7 tells the story of Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986), chosen as a child by Annie Besand to be the Theosophical World Teacher, who himself became disillusioned about being a guru and in 1929 announced “Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot

approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path” (p. 228). Reading about Brown’s alternative spiritual odyssey, however entertaining, is (for this reader, at least) in part a dispiriting experience. He chronicles so many seekers, so many channeled guides and messages, so many spiritual destinations to visit, and delivers so little in the way of genuine human (let alone spiritual) wisdom and good faith. Despite the patent sincerity of most seekers, the whole business of visiting gurus and holy places turns into a vast network of global travel, through which affluent and not so affluent Westerners ‘other’ the East, particularly India, and treat its traditions and religions as either recreational activities, or therapies for their personal problems. For anyone interested in contemporary religions and spiritualities, the West’s focus on the ‘wisdom of the East,’ and the fascinating phenomenon of spiritual tourism, this book is essential, unmissable, reading.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney

Michael Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations and Encounters* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. xii + 292, ISBN 9780415549325 (Pbk).

This book is of the type that I, as a scholar engaged in the study of the confluence of religions and travel phenomena, am compelled to laud as overdue, comprehensive, and necessary to a field of study thus far incongruously neglected by the academy. While in various respects it certainly is all of those things, it is also a book about which I have many reservations. There have been a small number of monographs treating religions and tourism to a qualitative analysis, and in many respects this addition from Stausberg signals the establishment of a comprehensive scholarly analysis of the field. Early on, the author states the currency of the subject matter for scholars of both tourism and religions: “we can no longer ignore the fact that tourism and religion are in various ways tied together in the modern world” (pp. 1-2). Modernity, tied as it is to individualism, industrialisation, democracy, and capitalism, has been a problematic concept for scholars of religions, for it is also tied to secularisation. Indeed, the classic, though problematic, secularisation thesis, and thus modernity, contends the death of religions.

Despite modernity (and secularisation), religions continue. It should thus mark a critical and symbolic point in the study of Western societies to write that tourism (the leisure activity of moderns, *par excellence*) continues to be intimately linked with religions. That “touring and holidaying appear to be indispensable features of life under the conditions of modernity” (p. 5), has led many scholars to see tourism as a replacement for religious belief and practice. However, Stausberg notes that “the major finding of the present book” is that tourism is not the other to religion, but is “a major arena, context and medium for religion in the contemporary global world” (p. 8). What is most appealing about the book is this attempt to comprehensively cover the points at which tourism and religiosity overlap, meet, or intertwine. These meetings are many and varied, ranging from discrimination towards Jewish holiday makers in 1950s America, to the Worlds Religious Travel association, and to religious sites to be found at airports. As a survey of the field and its research possibilities, this book succeeds admirably.

There is, indeed, much to be praised about this book, yet as I read through it I increasingly found myself quibbling with the author, and then taking issue with the text as a whole. For example, the travel ‘device’ Stausberg utilises throughout is somewhat laboured. At times it becomes twee, for example, “souvenirs” are left for readers at the end of each chapter, and the metaphor is laid on liberally (p. 2); “before leaving each station” (before finishing a chapter), “having reached the terminus” (having reached the end), and “other itineraries are possible” (other approaches are possible), and this becomes tiresome. More problematically, however, this kind of approach renders the book into an undergraduate text – for first years at most – and seems overly casual. This is a grave error by both Stausberg and the publishers at Routledge, and a shame as the author makes some important contributions and the text should accordingly treat itself more professionally. Attesting to this playing-down of the subject are the ‘Souvenirs’ sections themselves, set as bullet points in greyed-out text boxes, which seem to be in lieu of proper conclusions to many of the book’s chapters.

By Chapter 1, the lack of any definition or approach to the topic of ‘religion,’ apart from a few general remarks, makes Stausberg’s argument difficult to follow. While there is a section discussing the definition of ‘tourism’ there is none for ‘religion,’ which is an odd omission and imbalance, especially considering the title of the text. Thus, while the author is right to note that religious tropes are invoked in touristic description, just what this means remains unclear. Equally fraught is Stausberg’s assertion that tourists may encounter and engage with religious traditions and practices without believing or belonging to them. At its simplest, a person may enter a church

and light a candle without being religious, but simply because this seems to be something appropriate for them to do as a tourist. This, of course, adds a further dimension to Grace Davie's 'believing without belonging' thesis,¹ but the lack of any full explanation concerning what Stausberg conceives 'religion' to be results in such examples being, at best, vague. The best I can surmise, from what is included in this book, is that the 'religion' in *Religion and Tourism* seems to refer to institutional formations that resemble Christianity, at least to a certain degree, but mostly as a reference to what people believe, practice, and say within those formations. This, I am sad to write, is unclear to the point of being unhelpful throughout the entire text.

Stausberg, however, has done a spectacular job of attempting to at least flag subjects within the field of tourism and religion that have almost entirely been neglected. In this regard the book is well worth the purchase price and time spent reading it. However, there remain, for me, numerous methodological and mechanical problems with the argument therein. For example, I would appreciate a reference to any form of evidence (primary or secondary) to support the author's contention that pilgrimage and mission activities are increasingly being worked into leisure frameworks. Like Stausberg, I believe this is going on, but we must have, and most importantly we must give our readers, sources for the evidence that supports our beliefs. By way of example, World Youth Day, the massive Catholic tradition that Stausberg provocatively refers to as an "invented pilgrimage" (p. 59), is given only a Wikipedia entry as the total of academic and primary evidence and scholarship. This is simply inadequate, especially when one of the scholars to have published on the topic, Danielle Hervieu-Leger, is elsewhere cited in the text.

A number of things, which Stausberg intends as asides, are frustratingly left unexplained. For example, on page 61 a paragraph is finished by stating, "[m]oreover, there are several direct offshoots of the Camino, for example in Germany." This might be perfectly obvious to the author, but most readers will not know much, if anything, about these offshoots, how 'official' they may or may not be, nor where to obtain further information on them. Similarly, the sentence, "Consider the existence of materials such as a French tourist guidebook to places of religious and spiritual interest throughout Europe" (p. 63), is used (with a reference to said book) as the sole evidence of cross-denominational interest in sacred sites. A simple sentence or two, or simply a reference to relevant scholarly material, would be sufficient to make such statements useful, but for some reason Stausberg has chosen not to do so. Such

¹ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994).

examples, of which there are many throughout the book, become 'throwaways,' which feel academically pointless. Often where there is a citation the work to which the author has referred is either itself a general work on tourism or religions, or is not specifically a study of the phenomenon to which he is referring. To be sure, in part this is a problem of a field of study that is bereft of scholarly attention (for no good reason), so Stausberg is not solely to blame. What I ultimately wish is that his analysis would have more often included discussions of this paucity of specific research.

The combined result is a book that feels like it could have, indeed should have, been a watershed moment in the scholarly analysis of religions and tourism. Sadly, *Religion and Tourism* is not. What it is, however, is a useful reference work for future studies in the field, and best suited to newcomers (undergraduate students, interdisciplinary studies students and scholars, etc.). As such, while this book does not contribute much new material to the field, I nonetheless think it a valuable addition to what at present is a grossly under-researched area. For this, the author is to be commended.

Alex Norman
University of Sydney

Dominic Janes and Gary Waller (eds), *Walsingham in Literature and Culture from the Middle Ages to Modernity* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), pp. xvi + 247, ISBN 9780754669241 (Hbk).

This edited volume approaches the medieval English pilgrimage town of Walsingham through three methodological lenses; the study of landscape and the sacred, the body and sexuality, and the constructions of cultural memory (chiefly literature, music, and architecture). The first section on sacred place opens with Stella A. Singer's chapter on the medieval construction of Walsingham as a 'new Nazareth' as a result of the visions of Richeldis de Faverches, who established the cult of the 'Holy House' there, and the ways in which English pilgrims understood themselves to be journeying to the Holy Land when they travelled to Walsingham. Michael P. Carroll then considers the practice of pilgrimage to the shrine in the early sixteenth century, just prior to Henry VIII's Reformation, and through consideration of material culture it is concluded that Catholic lay devotion was more varied and vigorous than Protestant triumphalists would generally acknowledge. Simon Coleman's concluding chapter engages with contemporary pilgrimage to Walsingham and introduces the shifts in sensibility that enabled medieval Catholic devotional

practices to be revived in the nineteenth century and the crucial figure of Alfred Hope Patten, who renovated Walsingham and Marian piety in the early twentieth century.

The second part is of less interest to students of travel, both sacred and secular, in that it focuses on issues of the body and sexuality. Carole Hill investigates the figure of St Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, in the piety of Walsingham, a Marian shrine. Royal pilgrims travelled to Walsingham to beg the Virgin to intercede on their behalf in matters of pregnancy and childbirth. Gary Waller continues this exploration with a consideration of the relics of Walsingham that were traceable to Mary's body; "hair, milk, girdles, clothing" (p. 113), and of the way that the sexualised body of the Virgin was employed in Protestant denunciations of the site. The late Nigel Yates' chapter on Walsingham and inter-War Anglo-Catholicism covers both changes in sexual mores and the relationship between discourses of Anglo-Catholicism and of homosexuality. This train of scholarly enquiry is extended by the volume's co-editor, Dominic Janes, in his chapter 'Queer Walsingham,' which interrogates Hope Patten, Mariolatry, and Anglo-Catholicism through a queer lens.

The third section covers Walsingham's contribution to English architecture, music, and literature. From this perspective, the physical shrine and the activity of travelling to it are less important than its representation in material objects. This view had been hinted at in Michael Carroll's and Susan Signe Morrison's chapters (which looked at pilgrim badges, among other material elements of culture) in the first part of the book. Susan Dunn-Hensley's chapter is an elegant investigation of Shakespeare's later plays with a view to identifying elements of Marian devotion. Her analyses of *Pericles, A Winter's Tale* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are convincing evidence for her claim that "while it would be many years before the sacred virgin would return to Walsingham, through Shakespeare's work, she came alive again on the early modern stage" (p. 197). The final essay by Barry Spurr examines Walsingham in the works of two American twentieth-century poets, the Anglo-Catholic T. S. Eliot and the Roman Catholic convert Robert Lowell, linking the two through what he calls the "poetics of Incarnation" (p. 242). There is much of interest in this edited volume, though it must be acknowledged that the travel elements – the analysis of Walsingham as a sacred site and the consideration of touristic and pilgrimage elements associated with it – are subordinated to a more literary and cultural agenda.

Carole M. Cusack
University of Sydney

Tony Judt, *The Memory Chalet* (London: Vintage, 2011), pp. xiv + 226, ISBN 9780099555599 (Pbk).

Before dying of Lou Gehrig's Disease in 2010, Tony Judt built his reputation as an historian of France in the 20th Century and, towards the end of his life, as an historian of modern Europe. *The Memory Chalet* was compiled partly from extant essays and new writing composed as Judt became slowly incapacitated from his affliction from 2009. This book is not a deep consideration of academic approaches to travel, but it is a work charmingly and profoundly relevant to this edition because of the way that, in almost every sentence, Judt describes his life as though it were synonymous with the concept of journey, subtly examining how a life can be both understood and justified through the overarching field of travel. One telling example of this is when he seeks to convey the essence of this home town of Putney. To do so, Judt provides a one-page excursus on the various train and bus routes one could use to get in and out of this London suburb. Being in the world for Judt is being very practically connected to the elsewhere. Thus it is as a recollection of his own life's journey that *The Memory Chalet* offers a delicate, nostalgia-laden, and extremely personal account of what our ideas of journey may mean at the very basic level of movement as existence.

Judt's journey is bookended by accounts of Switzerland. With a Belgian-born father and a deeper ancestry that extended to Eastern-European Jewry, Judt remarks on his family's fascination with European holiday destinations at a time when most post-war British families considered a short drive to Blackpool unbearably long. Switzerland was one of the locations for family holidays. At the age of 10 in a chalet in Chesières, the young Judt one night fell in with a group of British actors who bestowed on him that experience some of us are fortunate enough to gather from strangers as we travel; a radical and delightful expansion of our worldview through a chance meeting, suggesting that perhaps the unexpected gifts of strangers are the most precious.

Stylistically, the author's talent is to be able to take his readers into a different world on the back of only a few telling words. The austerity of post-war Britain, the anti-Semitic jibes of his fellow students in preparatory school, the family holidays across Western Europe, and young Judt's ability to throw himself into the world, are all conveyed with a precise but beautiful efficiency in this small work.

In the chapter 'Mimetic Desire,' Judt argues that if love is "that condition in which one is most contentedly oneself" (pp. 65-66) then it follows that he loved trains and was loved by them in return for the condition of

'oneselfness,' as it were, that they bestowed upon him in his journeys as a child. Here we meet wrapped within an enthusiast of journeys, the constrained railway enthusiast. With a delightful precision, Judt recounts his youth riding various lines on the Southern Region of British Rail, and in a brief sentence or two we understand that the author's fearsome knowledge of the history of these various lines functions as a deep archaeology beneath his entertaining asides. He may love trains, but one suspects he loves just a little more the effective structure of a good piece of writing, and his enthusiasm does not bore.

Other journeys are recounted: months spent on a Kibbutz coming to terms with his fading Zionism, his years at King's College, Cambridge, then as a *pensionnaire étranger* at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, all of which mix education with a sense of flux and movement, rather than an illusion of emplacement and certainty. Judt's idea of motion and memory are developed within a wider attitude of learning as an elite pursuit, one that is justified if such elite experiences are open to all through meritocratic gateways. Judt also suggests that this elite be self-aware and self-critical as his own deep awareness of himself. Thus he is confused that the meritocrats of post-war Britain came to fashion a society under Thatcher and Blair that was less based on merit than it was on savagely standardising the educative experience. Judt also censures himself for an early eagerness for Marxism and revolution that, in the 1960s, had both him and his generation fascinated by revolt in Western Europe, but ignorant of real change that was fulminating under oppressive circumstances in Eastern Europe. His explanation for this is again powerful, but concise:

Above all[,] the thrall in which an ideology holds a people is best measured by their collective inability to imagine alternatives ... It was in just such terms that communism was presented to its beneficiaries following World War II; and it was because history afforded no apparent alternative to a Communist future that so many of Stalin's foreign admirers were swept into intellectual captivity (p. 180).

It is because of a series of journeys that Judt makes into Eastern Europe in the 1980s that he corrects his ideological ignorance by learning Czech and contributing, in his own way, to events that led to the Velvet Revolution. The author leaves one with the feeling that if in the 1960s he had travelled just a little further into Europe at that time, his understanding of Eastern Europe would have flourished much earlier and far more compassionately. This again returns the book to the deep connection between education and travel.

Education, then, has its own benefits, as the author relocates by way of a mid-life crisis from Oxford to New York University and from divorce with his second wife to an (almost?) inappropriate relationship with a then graduate

student, and later dance historian, Jennifer Homans. Most hilariously he summons the bravado to ask Homans on a date to see David Mamet's *Oleanna*, itself a powerful exploration of inappropriate teacher-student relationships (the irony of this is a little startling). It is a brave thing to see this issue of student-staff liaisons discussed in such a manner, but sadly with little depth. Judt believes the issue is resolved by his marriage to Homans, but could we say that such a matter can be so quickly dismissed? The final part of the book has Judt praising New York, at one level for its similarity to Putney in that it is the interconnectedness of New York to the world that most fascinates him.

The title of this book links us to Jonathan Spence's 1984 book *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, which refers to gargantuan spatio-mental constructs that Jesuits were trained to build in their minds as a way of remembering not only vast tracts of Scripture, but also all the information required to master local languages, customs, and philosophies on their missionary journeys. In such memory zones space becomes knowledge. For Judt, his more modest memory chalet was a place he could retire to long after his body had ceased to be able to communicate to others or travel in the world. Earlier when speaking of his love for trains, he laments his inability to ever take a train again (physically, anyway). One wonders where Tony Judt was in the last, still moment of his life when his disease had almost completely disconnected him from the world. In this work he makes one suggestion as to where he might have been. His book concludes with a return to Switzerland and the small village and resort of Mürren which stands powerfully in his mind:

I have never thought of myself as a rooted person. We are born by chance in one town rather than another and pass through various temporary homes in the course of our vagrant lives – at least that is how it has been for me. Most places hold mixed memories ... [but] Mürren never changes. Nothing ever went wrong there.

There is a path of sorts that accompanies Mürren's pocket railway. Halfway along, a little café – the only stop on the line – serves the usual run of Swiss wayside fare. Ahead, the mountain falls steeply away into the rift valley below. Behind, you can clamber up to the summer barns with the cows and goats and shepherds. Or you can just wait for the next train: punctual, predictable, and precise to the second. Nothing happens: it is the happiest place in the world. We cannot choose where we start in life, but we may finish where we will. I know where I shall be: going nowhere in particular on that little train, forever and ever (p. 226).

The Memory Chalet takes us somewhere remarkable, into a mind that remains sensitive to the full power of space and our movement through it as remembrance, education, inter-connectedness, and to life as journey. As we

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throw ourselves deeper into methodological and sometimes wildly abstract academic postulations on travel, Judt's book is a work of touching recollections that remind us exactly how human a journey can and should be.

Christopher Hartney
University of Sydney