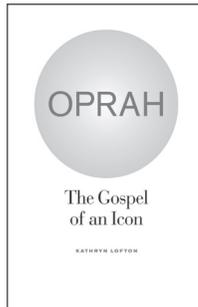
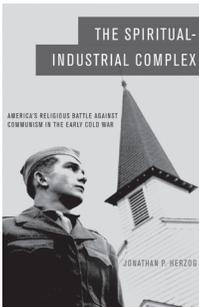


Review Essay

Public Policy, Popular Culture, Celebrity, and the Making of a Spiritual-Industrial Marketplace in Postwar America

Lerone Martin



THE SPIRITUAL-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War. By Jonathan P. Herzog. New York: Oxford University Press. 2011.

OPRAH: The Gospel of an Icon. By Kathryn Lofton. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2011.

Several trends hallmark religion in postwar America. Scholars have identified several major forces including: the increased vitality of “world” religions, suburbanization, the decreasing significance of denominationalism, the political emergence of the religious right, and the increasing popularity of therapeutic spirituality and religious commodities. Traditional sources, including denominational figures and studies, church mapping and architecture, nationwide religion polls, and the activities of iconic figures and commodities such as revivalists Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale, and the success of the latter’s best seller, *The Power*

of *Positive Thinking* (1952), have been readily implored to describe how religion took shape during the era. However, recently scholars have increasingly turned to under-utilized sources in the study of postwar religion. Jonathan Herzog's focus on government sources and the influence of public policy on religion following World War II and Kathryn Lofton's study of the religious and spiritual affect of commercial icon Oprah are two intriguing examples of this trend.

It has long been noted that President Eisenhower's administration was wedded to the Cold War and the military-industrial complex following World War II. In his Presidential Farewell Address, the military hero stated that the dangers of the postwar world required the nation to no longer depend on the "makers of plowshares . . . to make swords." Rather, in Cold War America, the nation had to "create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions": a military-industrial complex.¹ This pronouncement and the subsequent influence of the Cold War upon postwar American politics and foreign policy is well known. However, lesser known is the Cold War's explicit influence in shaping America's religious landscape.

In *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, Jonathan Herzog painstakingly chronicles how the Cold War influenced religion in postwar America via what he refers to as the "spiritual-industrial complex": the collective and deliberate leveraging of state, federal, commercial, media, and celebrity resources for national religious revitalization. The ultimate goal of this political, commercial, and theological composite was to create a resurgence of religiosity and religious adherence as a means to combat and eventually defeat godless Communism (6). For Herzog, this spiritual mobilization was "sacralization," not to be confused with "civil religion." Herzog defines civil religion as the "use of the sacred to legitimize the secular." Spiritual "Cold War Warriors," however, did the opposite; they "used the secular to legitimize the sacred" through a "deliberate and managed use of societal resources to stimulate a religious revival in the late 1940's and 1950's" (6, 179).

The author traces the genesis of this spiritual complex to the religious and political rhetoric of the successive presidential administrations of Truman and Eisenhower as well as a host of other political and cultural Cold War crusaders. These policy makers, religious professionals, and commercial icons boiled down the intricate nature of the Cold War between American and Soviet ideology into a series of simplistic dichotomies: American freedoms vs. communist slavery; good vs. evil; or faithful vs. faithless (81). Moreover, Communism was defined as a belief that was held by its communicants with "religious" fervor (197). As Herzog points out, President Truman aptly stated in one Christmas Eve address, "We are all joined in the fight against communism. Communism is godless . . . Democracy's most powerful weapon is not a gun, a tank, or a bomb. It is faith—faith in the brotherhood and dignity of man under God" (79). Accordingly, Herzog displays how policy makers and clergy framed the Cold War not as an "economic and political struggle between the oppressed and the powerful," but rather a holy war between traditional religious/Christian faith, freedoms, and

American livelihoods in opposition to the godless religious zeal of Communism (81, 126). The Cold War, at heart, was a spiritual battle.

In 1933, President Hoover's research committee noted, "The most fundamental change in the intellectual life of the United States . . . is the apparent shift from Biblical authority and sanctions to scientific and factual authority and sanctions."² The author posits that Cold War crusaders perceived this "Religious Depression" (declining home and foreign missionary activities, shrinking church attendances, and the decrease of the social authority of clergy and religion), as a catastrophic trend. Cold War spiritual warriors, the author argues, placed religious faith as the foundation of the "American way of life" (free enterprise, belief in the sacred nature of individual free will, and representative democracy) (137). If religion were in decline, surely the fate of the entire nation would follow closely. Freedom and religious virtue go hand-in-hand. To waver from such Godly foundations would unravel the nation into godless collectivism and the tyranny of Communism (137). America's newfound world dominance of military power and material success could not save it from the evils of the postwar world (145). Each and every American, as well as the Nation, had a soul, one that was constantly in need of salvation and redirection from materialism, military might, and cultural progress. Perhaps, at least from this writer's perspective, Billy Graham encapsulated the moment best in 1957. The clergyman, flanked by Vice President Richard Nixon, announced at a Yankee Stadium revival: "When communism conquers a nation, it makes every man a slave! When Christianity conquers a nation, it makes every man a king!" Simply put, without a resurrection of faith—the very foundation of Americanism—the nation and the American way of life was in peril. America needed spiritual mobilization.

Herzog's research reveals in great detail how the mobilization of the spiritual-industrial complex dovetailed with the postwar economic and baby boom, nuclear anxiety, and advancements in communication technologies to produce unprecedented growth in church/synagogue membership and thus shape postwar religion and politics for years to come. The author's analysis is too comprehensive to be recounted in full here. However, a few examples do well to display the spiritual-industrial complex at work. Perhaps the most lingering religious and political harvests of this era is the use of legislation to "sacrilize" national civic life. In 1954, Congress voted in favor of inscribing "In God We Trust" on stamps for standard international postages (101). The focus on the international stamp was not a mistake; the true foundation of America would be exported around the world whenever and wherever American materials were shipped. Similarly, in 1955, Congress passed a bill mandating that "In God We Trust" be placed on all paper currency (coinage began bearing this inscription in 1865) (108). Policy makers made certain that the globe's strongest currency bore witness to what they deemed the most important message of the Cold War.

In addition, on Flag Day, June 14, 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill legislating the words "under God" be added to the Pledge of Allegiance (105). Americans were not simply pledging their allegiance to a flag or a nation, but to



Figure 1: Billy Graham speaks with President Dwight Eisenhower, May 10, 1957. Photo courtesy of the National Park Service and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library & Museum.

the God whose Providence was guiding that nation. Finally, in 1956, “In God We Trust” became the official national motto. The House of Representatives believed a religious national motto, instead of the old adage *E Pluribus Unum* would be of “great spiritual and psychology value to our country.” President Eisenhower even saw fit to get baptized shortly after taking office. He was seemingly morphed into High Priest in Chief. The Republican National Committee went so far as to approve a resolution declaring Eisenhower “not only the political leader but the spiritual leader of our times” (174). The author convincingly shows the reader how the spiritual-industrial complex altered some Americans’ expectations of government. The body politic was a righteous instrument whose moral purpose was the revitalization of America’s faith in (a) God. Indeed, our pledge, currency, and national motto made it clear: America was officially a nation in covenant with God.

In addition to overt policy decisions, the nation’s security institutions were utilized to arm the spiritual-industrial complex. Following World War II, religion in the armed forces, according to President Truman, was a vital part of “enhancing the military preparedness and security of the nation” (117). The president’s failed Universal Military Training plan (required military service for men following high school) and its more triumphant successor, the Committee on Religion and

Welfare in Armed Forces, set off a bevy of significant policy changes in the military. The policy mandated that at least one chaplain was required for every 1,200 soldiers. The Army and Navy significantly increased its construction of chapels on their respective bases, as well as a chapel at Valley Forge in an attempt to lionize the religious influence of George Washington's military accomplishments. The newly established Armed Forces Chaplains Board drafted a uniform religious policy including a mandatory religious instruction program. The Air Force even provided the Moody Institute of Science with a crew and a B-25 plan to travel from base to base to preach and show their series of films that depicted the compatibility of science and biblical literalism. By 1951, reportedly nearly two hundred thousand airmen were viewing the films every year (113-22). The spiritual-industrial complex established religion, primarily Christianity, in the military as a central tenet of national security and global defense.

Societal resources and commercial enterprises were also employed to stoke the nation's religious revival. In print, Henry Luce, through his publishing empire, which included *Time* and *Life*, detailed to his readers how Communism posed the greatest threat to the nation (145). General Electric President Charles E. Wilson supported the Religion in American Life (RIAL) advertising campaign. The program ran for ten straight years, from 1949 to 1958, using celebrity endorsements to celebrate religious participation. Luminaries such as Jackie Robinson, Norman Rockwell, J. Edgar Hoover, and even the image of Betty Crocker appeared in print to remind the nation of the global and patriotic imperative of renewing its religious devotion (150). Hollywood and entertainment luminaries such as Bing Crosby, Ronald Regan, and Walt Disney to name a few, were on the governing board of the Committee to Proclaim Liberty, a spiritual mobilization propaganda group (151). Hollywood's influence was not left solely to advertising campaigns. Leading filmmaker Cecil DeMille appeared on screen prior to showings of his 1956 epic film *The Ten Commandments*, alerting audiences that the film was essentially "the story of the birth of Freedom." DeMille added that the film, which remains one of the highest grossing films of all time when adjusted for inflation, was primarily concerned with the continuing battle over "whether man ought to be ruled by God's law or whether he ought to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Ramesses." He continued, "Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God?" (160). Hollywood had the answer for the world to behold.

Perhaps the bipartisan and all-inclusive nature of Herzog's spiritual-industrial complex can best be seen in his depiction of The American Heritage Foundation's Freedom Train. Commercial companies such as Eastern Airlines, General Motors, Ford Motors, Standard Oil, General Electric, Bell Telephone, and U.S. Steel all funded a traveling rail exhibit of America's founding documents. The American Heritage Foundation's mobile showcase was armed with free railroad transportation provided by the nation's railroad industry and the blessing of America's leading theologian: Reinhold Niebuhr. The traveling exhibit included one hundred original documents on loan from the nation's capitol including the Mayflower Compact and writings by Roger Williams, a scion of American

religious freedom. The train aimed to highlight how American freedoms were established on religious principles, drawing a distinction between American liberty and the slavery of Communism. Cold War warriors deployed rhetoric and activities such as the Freedom Train to persuade the nation that its history and progress was an unfolding plan guided by divine Providence. Communism, on the other hand, viewed history as the agent of godless economic determinism (137). A reported three and a half million people in three hundred communities beheld the freedom train (81, 149). Liberty required a vibrant religious ethos and foundation. Reclaiming and/or re-inventing that religious foundation was vital in the spiritual-industrial complex.

Eventually, leading scholars and intellectuals, despite rapid church membership growth, began to raise doubts about the nation's purported religious revival. Theologian and ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr and religious historian Martin Marty, for example, deemed the spiritual-industrial complex and resulting revival, at best, a growth in religious interest. At worst, it was a flush of bland and general religion and ambiguous belief that worshiped worship, had faith in faith, and emphasized "visible acts over internal belief" (178). Much worse, the spiritual-industrial complex further sacralized and thus blurred the lines between religion, capitalism, commerce, consumer culture, and governance. The "American" way of life and culture became synonymous with Christian spirituality and divine virtues. American democracy became the ultimate, according to Martin Marty, and religion its handmaiden (178). The spiritual-industrial complex, according to such views, was primarily of instrumental value for national, economic, and personal ends.

Herzog argues that the larger context of the spiritual-industrial complex is key to understanding contemporary religion and politics. Failure to acknowledge the particularities of the era contributes to a collective memory that considers adages such as "Under God" not as relics of the Cold War, but as "eternal American truth—passed down, perhaps, from the lips and quills of the founders themselves" (108). Instances of this collective memory are not hard to trace. One relatively recent example is the continued push for public policy decisions that cohere to explicit notions of America's Christian origins.³ One needs to look no further than the 2011 passing of House Concurrent Resolution Thirteen ("That Congress reaffirms 'In God We Trust' as the official motto of the United States and supports and encourages the public display of the national motto in all public buildings, public schools, and other government institutions"). The resolution posits that the motto was seemingly established at the founding of the nation. The actual 1956 passage of the national motto, during the Cold War, is not even mentioned. Such relics of Cold War spirituality are legion and fairly explicit in contemporary political and religious cultures.

However, in *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*, Kathryn Lofton draws our attention to an equally pervasive and influential, but perhaps not as obvious, spiritual/religious vestige of the era. Lofton presents us with a compelling and insightful portrait of Oprah Winfrey as a site in which one can see an embodiment of the

spiritual practices that were assiduously hashed out during the sacralization of postwar America; namely the spiritualization of the “American” way of life. Similarly to Herzog’s text, *Oprah* displays how seemingly unconnected “secular occupations and religious ones” often act in concert. Lofton, with her emphasis on media and popular culture, argues for the “constituent nature” of secular and religious occupations (18). Indeed, in Oprah’s celebrity and commercial empire the “Spiritualization of American Culture” can be seen at its climax (50, 58). Oprah’s worldwide “ministry” is conducted in the most diligent and ubiquitous manner possible: internet, television, and print: the spiritual-industrial complex known here simply as “Harpo, Inc.”

Lofton’s insightful text examines Oprah’s empire alongside key theoretical categories in the field of Religious Studies (i.e. ritual, exchange, sacred, etc.) to display how Oprah is a pivotal example of “how religious forms are configured by and through the modern moment.” Moreover, in Oprah we see the modern ethos of the sacred “inseparability of consumer choice and religious option” and the popular trend to “transcend” racial categories in our purported post-racial moment (18, 129, 212).

With this in mind, Oprah provides the masses with the possibility of transcendence, personal growth, transformation, and a better life by employing an “ambiguous theism” and the spirituality of consumerism (22, 32, 49). For Oprah, as Lofton highlights, spirit is not religion per se. Rather spirit is “a transcendent difference in contrast with the life you live.” Spirituality then, is a “set of choices within a broad banquet of rejuvenation,” that enables the “pursuit of revelation, of the divine, and of your authentic Best Life through regimens of practice” (22). As Oprah herself has stated, spirit is “just about what is really great about yourself and remembering to live that way.” Oprah aids persons in this process of memory and reclamation of spirit by supplying the nation with an arsenal of products and complementary spiritual practices.

As Lofton shows, Oprah’s spirit industry includes her own products and those she has approved. Both promise to connect persons with the life they want and/or aid one in the process of becoming the self one needs to be in order to create the desired life (58-60). Her enterprise presents a gamut of opportunities, spaces, and products that promote and enable spiritual practice and rejuvenation; including clothes, yoga, reading, and/or religious practices. Oprah, for example, will encourage us to mediate on or perhaps pray in the tub with, of course, bath products she has assuredly endorsed (62). This will aid our individual efforts to reach our desired life and/or transform us into the persons who can obtain our Best Life. Accordingly, the words, products, and recommendations of Oprah (who is both preacher and product) possess salvific and transformative potential and significance (23). This gospel of transformation and change is not necessarily about “change itself, but change as affect,” a therapeutic process that enables hearers, at the very least, to see their lives, circumstances, and potential anew. Spirituality is the medium of this alteration (56-57).

Lofton compellingly argues her case. Three examples are seminal in showing the “religious affect” of Oprah’s presence and the “secular rites” she invokes and leads. Oprah’s role as the MC at the “A Prayer for America” assembly at Yankee Stadium on September 23, 2001 epitomized her consummate status as a spiritual leader, ambiguous theist, celebrity, and juggernaut of consumer culture. The five-hour interfaith memorial ceremony for victims of 9/11 had a roster full of religious professionals, clergy, and politicians from numerous faith communities. Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs, Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians offered prayers, songs, and speeches to commemorate the tragic incident. Only Oprah was chosen to steer the diverse religious and civic gathering. No preacher dominates communication technology like her, no celebrity is equally popular on the coasts and “flyover country,” and no product transcends race and difference and its appeals to the consuming public like the all-pervasive O. Simply put, in Lofton’s words, Oprah is “the preacher queen” (118-19).

In addition, Oprah, similar to contemporary spiritual leaders such as Joel Osteen and Rick Warren, provides the space, commodity, guidance, and meaning to rituals of personal transformation.⁴ For Lofton, this is most readily visible in the rites of the “makeover.” This sacramental process involves home remodeling, physical makeovers, as well as the gifting of new cars, wardrobes, and other wares. However, the focus of the transformation is not just the object, material gain, consumption, nor is it to be reduced to a marketing bait and switch. Rather, Lofton draws our attention to the spiritual empowerment of the exchange. The recipients are made anew with “the compliment the goods supply, with the galvanized ambition they provide to pursue their even better life” (86).

Closely related is Oprah’s ritual or public spectacle of confession that occurs on the altar of the television studio and/or interview couch. Lofton compares this process to nineteenth-century revivals. She puts forward that Oprah’s tactics are very closely related to Charles Finney’s “new measures.” Finney, a leading revivalist of the Second Great Awakening, is often credited with routinizing and professionalizing revivalism. He popularized new rituals such as the “anxious” or “sinners’ bench.”⁵ The bench set sinners apart from the otherwise redeemed. Putting one’s self on the sinners’ bench then was first a public statement of sin, followed by submission to the divine and a commitment to change and truth. Finney admittedly fanned the flame of emotion to help carouse sinners to the bench and ultimately repentance. Lofton reveals that not only are Oprah’s interviews configured in ways similar to Finney’s revivals, but Oprah likewise compels her guests into an emotional and anxiety-filled process of response, confession, and repentance and/or to the path of a better life.

Interviews with “transgressors” such as fallen politician James McGreevy, Janet Jackson after her wardrobe malfunction at the Super Bowl, murderers, adulterers, and victims alike all come to Oprah’s anxious bench to confess, heal, and testify to “self-improvement.” Lofton devotes significant attention to the emblematic nature of James Frey’s two appearances on the “preacher queen’s” anxious seat. Frey appeared on the show to reflect on his highly praised and Oprah

Book Club memoir *A Million Little Pieces*. In the first interview, Oprah praised the author and his non-fiction book as a testament to spirit and self-actualization. Months later, after it was revealed that events in the book were significantly fabricated, Fry found himself seated once again in the anxious seat. The “sinful” author confessed his wrongs and was compelled to embark on a new path to “truth.” For Lofton, such moments make Oprah’s religious affect clear. Lofton concludes, “If Charles Finney was pastor to nineteenth century America, it is not an overstatement to suggest that Winfrey is his 21st century parallel” (95-100).

Herzog and Lofton have presented us with thorough and fascinating work that significantly aids our understanding of religion and spirituality in postwar America. These monographs rely on historical sources outside the parameters of the usual suspects (i.e. clergy and institutional/denominational sources) to narrate important and influential trends in the nation’s religious landscape. America’s spiritual-industrial complex—the “joint effort of government, business, education, the media, and others” aimed at reviving religiosity in American culture—and the iconic spiritual-industrial complex of Harpo, Inc. have greatly shaped modern spirituality, institutional religion, religious affect, and the politics of modern America.

Readers may be left with two questions after engaging these texts. First, how might the spiritual-industrial complex of the Cold War era look differently if we challenged the narrative of religious decline during the Depression era? Scholars such as Joel Carpenter, Matthew Sutton, Wallace Best, and Darren Dochuk, to name a few, have reminded us that American religiosity during the Depression era is less of a moment of decline than it is an era of diverse vibrancy.⁶ This comes into full view when the historical spotlight is placed on non-establishment Evangelicals, Fundamentalists, and Pentecostals such as the institutionalizing of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism (Bible schools, Bible camps, and associations) and the popular religious broadcasting careers of Charles Fuller, Aimee Semple McPherson, James M. Gates, and Elder Lucy Smith among others. Was religion or religiosity really on the decline? Such explorations might change how we understand what really motivated Cold War warriors beyond their own professed public and perhaps private reasoning as well as the religious function of the spiritual-industrial complex.

Concerning Oprah’s spiritual-industrial complex, there are a growing number of scholars who have convincingly traced the spirituality and religious affect of American popular culture. Scholars such as Catherine Albanese, Leigh Schmidt, Jon Butler, Courtney Bender, Nancy Ammerman and others have compellingly argued for a long and vibrant history of religious practices and spirituality in “secular” rites from the colonial era until now (which is encapsulated best by the contemporary popular maxim: “spiritual but not religious”). With this in mind, do Oprah’s harnessing, utilization, and merging of secular and sacred occupations and rites represent a new form of modern religiosity analogous to Finney? Or should we understand her as a continuation of the understudied trend of American spirituality? Indeed, there are ample Protestant clergy in the contemporary mo-

ment well-positioned for Finney's pulpit. Such perspectives might change how we historically understand not only the icon's historic positioning and that of her Gospel, but also the broader narrative of American spirituality.

To be sure, these two texts make great contributions to the field and do a great deal to help us understand and account for the current landscape of American religion.

Notes

1. To be sure, while Eisenhower justified the necessity of industrial armament, he also admonished the nation to always be mindful of the potential of the military-industrial complex to produce a "disastrous rise of misplaced power." See United States, President (1953-1961: Eisenhower), Dwight D. Eisenhower, and United States. Office of the Federal Register, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 8 vols., Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960, 1035-40.

United States President's Research Committee on Social Trends and Wesley C. Mitchell-Chairman, *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends with a Foreword by President Herbert Hoover*, vol. 1 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1933), 309. Here I am invoking Mark Chaves's notion of secularization not as the decline of religion necessarily, but as the increase of challenges to religious authority in American culture as a whole. See Mark Chaves, "Secularization as Declining Religious Authority," *Social Forces* 72 (1994).

2. See for example, David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

3. See for example, Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*, Religion, Race, and Ethnicity (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

4. William Gerald McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1959); Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996).

5. See for example, Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

6. See for example, Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, Studies in Cultural History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*, Chicago History of American Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

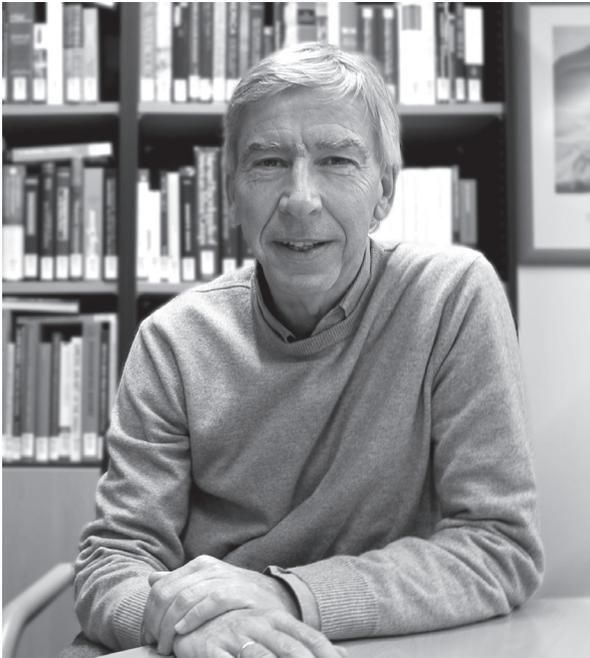
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