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Nova Religio, Volume 22, Number 1, August 2018, pp. 115-128 (Article)

Published by University of California Press



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Field Notes

The Children of Noah

Has Messianic Zionism Created a New World Religion?

Rachel Z. Feldman

ABSTRACT: Today, nearly 2,000 Filipinos consider themselves members of the “Children of Noah,” a new Judaic faith that is growing into the tens of thousands worldwide as ex-Christians encounter forms of Jewish learning online. Under the tutelage of Orthodox Jewish rabbis, Filipino “Noahides,” as they call themselves, study Torah, observe the Sabbath, and passionately support a form of messianic Zionism. Filipino Noahides believe that Jews are a racially superior people, with an innate ability to access divinity. According to their rabbi mentors, they are forbidden from performing Jewish rituals and even reading certain Jewish texts. These restrictions have necessitated the creation of new, distinctly Noahide ritual practices and prayers modeled after Jewish ones. Filipino Noahides are practicing a new faith that also affirms the superiority of Judaism and Jewish biblical right to the Land of Israel, in line with the aims of the growing messianic Third Temple Movement in Jerusalem.

KEYWORDS: Noahides, Bnei Noah, Philippines, Judaism, Zionism, Chabad, messianism, race

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 22, Issue 1, pages 115–128. ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480. (electronic). © 2018 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2018.22.1.115>.

Religion is a pervasive force of social change in post-colonial Filipino society. As increasing numbers of Filipinos question the hegemonic power of the Catholic Church, they are turning to new religious movements as sources of hope in the face of widespread economic and social inequality.¹ New messianic cults—from charismatic Christian groups to ISIS-affiliated Islamists—are offering Filipino converts a chance for salvation from the “soon-to-come apocalypse.” Within the hotbed of new religious sects that is the Philippines today, Judaism too has emerged as a spiritual pathway for those who wish to leave behind a Catholic or other Christian past. Today, nearly 2,000 Filipinos consider themselves members of the “Children of Noah” (*Bnei Noah*), a new Judaic faith that is growing globally into the tens of thousands. Under the tutelage of a small circle of Orthodox Jewish rabbis, Filipino “Noahides,” as they call themselves, study Torah, observe the Sabbath, and passionately support a form of messianic Zionism.

During the summer of 2017, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with Filipino Noahides on the island of Cebu, one of the most developed and densely populated provinces in the Philippines. This article presents some of my preliminary findings, including observations of ritual life, community structure, and the racial dynamics that shape the relationship between Filipino Noahides and their rabbi mentors in Israel.

WHAT IS A NOAHIDE?

According to Jewish law, a “Noahide” is a non-Jew who follows the “Seven Laws of Noah,” the commandments God gave to Noah after the flood, as derived from passages in the Torah.² Following orthodox interpretation, Jews are required to observe all 613 commandments given in the Torah, while non-Jews are only obligated to observe the Seven Laws of Noah. These laws, considered to be a moral code for all of humanity, will guarantee the non-Jew a place in the “world to come.”³

- 1) Do not deny God.
- 2) Do not blaspheme God.
- 3) Do not murder.
- 4) Do not engage in illicit sexual relations.
- 5) Do not steal.
- 6) Do not eat from a live animal.
- 7) Establish courts of justice and a legal system.

Traditionally in Jewish thought, a Noahide was simply a legal category for a “righteous non-Jew” who believed in the truth of Torah but did not

convert to Judaism. The widespread practice of Noahidism as a communal faith (rather than a Jewish legal category), with new rituals modeled after Jewish ones, began only in the late twentieth century and marks an important turning point in Jewish-gentile relations.⁴ Around the world, from Texas to Nigeria to Mexico to the Philippines, ex-Christians are taking up Jewish rituals, studying Torah, taking Hebrew names, adopting Jewish styles of dress, and establishing synagogues. While historically there have been a number of philosemitic movements, such as Christian churches adopting Jewish practices, Noahidism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is unique in that it involves Christians completely revoking their faith and allowing Jewish rabbis to guide their studies, dictate the content of their rituals, and define their relationship to Judaism.⁵

The rise and spread of global Noahidism, from the 1990s to the present, is linked to two important factors. First and foremost, the connective power of the Internet has enabled non-Jews living far from Jewish communities to access Jewish resources and Torah learning online. As previous scholarship has illustrated, the Internet plays an important role in facilitating the transnational movement of religious beliefs and the hybridization of different messianic ideologies.⁶ The majority of Noahides today are former evangelical Christians who left Christianity behind after becoming interested in the Old Testament and Hebrew roots of Christianity.⁷ Through the Internet, evangelicals have been able to access rabbis and online Noahide communities. Already ideologically primed as messianic Zionists, many ex-evangelicals see Noahidism as an entry point into Israel's unfolding messianic drama. Becoming a Noahide means playing a role in actualizing Jewish prophecy, which predicts the "return" of gentiles to a Noahide faith in the end of days.

By becoming Noahides through online exchanges with rabbis, and slowly building physical congregations, ex-evangelicals have been able to bypass the long and often expensive route to Orthodox Jewish conversion. Opting for an Orthodox conversion often means relocating to a major metropolitan area where they will be able to live inside a Jewish community, have access to Torah study, and begin living an observant lifestyle under the observation of their local community and overseeing rabbis. Instead, by becoming Noahides, ex-evangelicals can access the "truth of Torah" without actually converting to Judaism, and fulfill their prophesized "destiny," to play a parallel and supportive role to the chosen Jewish nation.

In addition to the Internet, the growth of Noahidism in the twenty-first century is undoubtedly linked to Israel's current prominent place on the world stage and the growing political and financial power of messianic Zionism. For the rabbis who mentor them online, the Noahides are an important sign that messianic times are approaching. These rabbis, largely members of Israel's religious Zionist demographic,

believe that the messianic era begins with the establishment of a Jewish theocratic state in Israel, supported by communities of Noahides worldwide.⁸

The majority of the rabbis who mentor Noahides are active members, or at least ideological supporters, of the Third Temple Movement in Israel, which aims to rebuild the Third Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount/Haram ash-Sharif in Jerusalem (where the Muslim shrine known as the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque are located), reestablish a Jewish priesthood, and lay the foundations for a fully theocratic state operating under Torah law. Due to the convergence of various social and political factors in Israel, since 2011 the Third Temple Movement has grown significantly, gaining support from the Israeli religious-nationalist demographic and Israeli lawmakers as well as international Christian and Noahide communities.⁹ As the Third Temple Movement's vision of a resurrected biblical order in Israel is amplified, it draws into question the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in messianic times. The Noahide religion responds to this question by carving out a place for non-Jews in the messianic Zionist project, providing them with a new spiritual identity and new forms of ritual life based on Jewish customs.

While there is a large body of scholarship examining the alliance of evangelical Christianity and Zionism, far less is known about the formation of a new, and more "kosher," alliance of ex-evangelical Noahides with Israel's theocratic rabbinic leaders. As one Orthodox rabbi stated explicitly in an online editorial, Noahides constitute the Jewish peoples' one true "group of gentile friends," in contrast to Zionist evangelicals who have always had "hidden agendas" and "ulterior motives."¹⁰ (For example, many evangelical Christians believe that the return of Jews to the Land of Israel is an important step in actualizing Christian Endtime prophecy and bringing the Second Coming of Jesus.) In some first-world Noahide communities, this new friendship between Noahides and Israeli rabbis takes on an economic dimension, as Noahides, particularly in the American Southwest, participate in bankrolling the Third Temple Movement in Israel.¹¹

In the following sections, I present some of the findings from fieldwork I conducted in the Philippines during the summer of 2017. Through the vignettes below, I highlight the ideological structure of Noahidism in the Philippines where, like most such communities worldwide, Noahide ideology has a markedly racial dimension that posits Jews as a racially superior people with an innate physiological ability to access divinity. For many Noahides, who formerly were devout Christians who believed in a literal interpretation of Old Testament events, these ideas are not entirely new. Noahidism continues to uphold an ethno-national idea of Jewishness, where contemporary Jews are believed to be the bloodline descendants of the ancient Israelites described in the Torah.

In the Philippines, this underlying racial and ethno-national ideology is used to reinforce the idea that Jews and Noahides are different categories of humanity, with different roles to play in initiating redemption. In order for Jews and Noahides to fulfill their roles, some rabbis believe that strict boundary lines must be maintained to differentiate the two communities. According to their rabbi mentors, Filipino Noahides are forbidden from performing Jewish rituals and even reading certain Jewish texts. These restrictions have necessitated the creation of new Noahide ritual practices and prayers modeled after Jewish ones. Other Noahide communities around the world may also be forbidden from certain Jewish rituals and texts, but the extent of these restrictions largely depends on the stance of their specific rabbi mentors. According to my preliminary research, there are at least ten different teams of Orthodox rabbis working with Noahide communities around the world, and they differ in their opinions on which aspects of Judaism are allowed for Noahides. The rabbi mentors guiding Filipino Noahides are predominantly from the Chabad Hasidic movement, and they take a firm stance when it comes to maintaining the distance and distinction between Jews and Noahides. Conversely, other groups of religious-nationalist rabbis in Israel encourage Noahides to freely adopt Jewish traditions and holiday observances. These divergent opinions on Noahide access to Judaism have brought about a competition for control over Noahide communities worldwide, as rabbis from different religious factions, with differing interpretations of Jewish law, try to situate themselves as global leaders of the Noahide movement with the “correct” understanding of Noahidism.

While each international Noahide community should be considered within its own particular historical and political context, this case study highlights some of the implications of Noahidism in the third world and global south. Filipino Noahides are participating in the creation of a new faith that affirms the superiority of Judaism and the Jewish biblical right to the Land of Israel, in line with the goals of the theocratic Third Temple Movement. I will highlight the limited ways in which Filipino Noahides come in contact with Torah learning, as they lack the financial resources to access the larger Jewish world where they might encounter more diverse and competing interpretations of Jewish identity, Jewish law, and Zionism.

NOAHIDISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

With fifteen synagogues on six different islands, the Philippines is home to the largest and most organized Noahide community in the world.¹² The strength of Noahidism in the Philippines can be explained by the fact that most Noahides in the Philippines are former members of a Seventh-day Adventist sect known as the Sacred Name Believers. When

Noahidism was introduced, the Sacred Name Believers movement in the Philippines already had the communal structures and leadership in place to quickly become an organized Noahide congregation. The Sacred Name Movement began in America in the early twentieth century with Sabbath-keeping Christian churches that were searching for the Hebrew roots of Christianity. In addition to adopting Jewish rituals, Sacred Name members developed the practice of vocalizing the Hebrew tetragrammaton (the four-letter name of God found in the Torah which Jews do not pronounce) as “Yahweh.”

The Sacred Name Believer sect that preceded Noahidism in the Philippines was led by preacher Gonzalo Villegas (1933–1997), an overseeing elder and leader in the movement in the Philippines since 1982. In the years leading up to his death, Gonzalo began making changes to the group, steering it away from the New Testament and belief in Jesus, and toward Jewish rituals such as candle-lighting on the Sabbath, and Jewish New Year and Passover rituals. After Gonzalo’s death, his sons Emmanuel and Abraham Villegas took control of the group, traveling to different islands and officially converting group members to Noahidism. To denounce their former Christian faith, followers on different islands collectively burned their Christian books, after first cutting out the names of God from the pages and burying those pieces according to Jewish tradition.

Emmanuel Villegas (born 1967) continues to serve as president of the community, having left his job of 20 years in government to work full time as a Noahide preacher. He is supported by Filipino Noahides living abroad including his brother Abraham, who works abroad and sends money home.¹³ Since he officially became a Noahide in 2000, Emmanuel has worked with rabbis in the United States and Israel via the Internet. These rabbi mentors provide him with Noahide lessons, instructions, and prayer materials, which he then translates and explains to his followers in their local Cebuano dialect. Because the majority of Filipino Noahides live in rural areas, they have limited financial means and access to online Jewish learning. They rely on Emmanuel to provide them with lessons and ritual instruction. When Emmanuel is absent, a local village leader or elder takes over leading prayers and Sabbath celebrations.

During the summer of 2017, I traveled to Cebu island to conduct fieldwork with two Noahide communities. The first is a middle-class community of approximately 100 city-dwellers who gather in their Noahide synagogue in urban Mandaue City for Sabbath services. On Sundays, the group meets in a bustling commercial downtown area of Cebu City in a Jewish house belonging to the Chabad Hasidic movement, where a visiting Israeli rabbi lectures on the seven Noahide laws.¹⁴

The second community is a rural and more financially challenged one, located in the mountainous agricultural region of Pinamungajan in

the Lamac *barangay* (village or district), and consisting of 7 Noahide families totaling 48 individuals. Lamac is a religiously diverse village with a mix of Catholic, other Christian, and ancestor-worshipping groups living in close proximity. The Noahide families, however, live apart from their Christian neighbors on an elevated hillside halfway between the lower village center and the mountain top, where twenty years ago they lived in caves as members of the Sacred Name Believers. One of these caves functioned as the Sacred Name “synagogue” where families kept the Jewish Shabbat and met for daily prayer. When they worshiped there, they called the cave-synagogue by the Hebrew name *Beit El*, meaning House of God.

After leaving the caves, the families settled on a hillside closer to the village center, where they currently live in small plywood and bamboo houses surrounding a new synagogue made of cement. The village leader, Diego,¹⁵ built this synagogue with money he saved while working as a construction worker in Saudi Arabia for two years. When entering the synagogue, community members always bow and remove their shoes at the front door, which stands adjacent to an Israeli flag and a giant poster of the Seven Noahide Laws. The synagogue is kept immaculately clean and treated as holy space. Constructed according to Jewish tradition, it is oriented so that worshipers pray facing Jerusalem. In place of Torah scrolls, a small English translation of the *Chumash* (a Torah in printed form) lies on the pulpit. Many Filipino Noahides, especially people under the age of 50, are fluent enough in English to read the five books of Torah and the commentaries contained inside the *Chumash*. In Lamac, where it is nearly impossible to connect to the Internet, this one book is the villagers’ most prized possession and their only continuous connection to the Jewish world. While it is not an actual Torah scroll, it has a sacred aura, as it contains the story of the flood and God’s covenant with Noah, which the Lamac Noahides have been taught is their biblical heritage.

NOAHIDES VERSUS JEWS: IDEOLOGY AND RITUAL PRACTICE

Although they adopt Jewish beliefs and rituals, most Noahides worldwide do not seek conversion to Judaism because they have been taught to make a clear distinction between Judaism and Jewishness. They view Jewishness as an ethno-national category reserved for those who are “Jews by blood,” contemporary descendants of the biblical “Children of Israel” who fled Egypt and became “God’s chosen people.” Because they see themselves as locked out of Jewishness by blood, many Noahides do not believe it appropriate to attempt conversion. Instead, they believe they can participate in certain universal aspects of Judaism by building

a new religion centered around the Seven Laws of Noah. They consider these to be the “original” covenantal laws of God with all of humankind that remain incumbent upon gentiles, who are interpreted as the literal descendants of the biblical Noah. The Noahide covenant, then, is understood as separate from the Mosaic covenant God gave specifically to the Jewish nation and their descendants after the Exodus from Egypt.

This idea of two different covenants in the Torah, one for Jews and one for non-Jews, allows Noahides to find a place inside the Torah and in Judaism alongside the “Israelite nation.” While Noahides have latched on to a seemingly universal principle inside Judaism, it is important to note that their interpretation of Judaism is constructed around an essential categorical difference between Jews and Noahides: the two groups represent different divinely sanctioned categories of humanity and are meant to serve different spiritual functions in the world and the coming messianic era.

Jeremiah, a 31-year-old man from the Lamac community, reiterated the genealogical differences between Jews and Noahides, implying that the racial differences among the descendants of Noah account for the success and power of various nations.

We are all the children of Noah, but after Nimrod we separated. You are very lucky because you are white, and white people are rulers of the earth. But you are also a Jew. You are very gifted because you have blood from the Chosen people, from Abraham and Isaac. And Abraham’s children who became Muslim also become very wealthy.

The idea of a hierarchical, racialized difference between Jews and Noahides was addressed again in Lamac by community president Emmanuel, who was visiting for the occasion of a Noahide wedding. He delivered a lecture on the essence of the Noahide soul, received from one of his rabbi mentors. After nightfall, the families gathered in the home of village leader Diego to listen to Emmanuel’s lecture. The women arrived dressed in long skirts, their hair completely covered and wrapped in colorful scarves per the Orthodox Jewish style, while the men placed yarmulkes from Israel on their heads. Emmanuel began his lecture by asking, “What makes them different from us? What makes the Jew different from us?” One villager quickly replied, “They are the chosen people.” Emmanuel then went on to explain that even if Jews and Noahides are equal before God, Jews have a special, innate holiness that makes them closer to God. “The Jew has five levels of soul while the Noahide only has three levels and remains on an animalistic level, and this is written in the Kabbalah,” he explained, adding that the fundamental animalistic nature of the Noahide soul accounts for the reason that they are more concerned with simplistic material needs. The Jew, on the other hand, is occupied with “spiritual labor, praying, studying

Torah all day, and eating kosher food.” According to Emmanuel, while it is “impossible for the Noahide to reach the level of the Jew,” Noahides must learn from Jews and continue to perfect themselves through observance of the Seven Laws. The Noahide may become “righteous among the nations” but never *holy* like the Jew.

The discussion then turned to the upcoming Jewish high holiday celebrations and the tradition of *slichot*, the prayers of repentance that Jews recite for one month leading up to the Jewish New Year. “You know it is forbidden for us to do Jewish rituals, but the rabbis have informed me that we can participate in *slichot* for the last four days of this month,” Emmanuel explained to the group. “Because it was during the last four days of the month of repentance when the sacrificial animals were inspected before being offered in the Temple on the Jewish New Year.” Emmanuel’s rabbinic mentors provided him with a new Noahide ritual that again contrasts the animalistic nature of the Noahide with the higher spiritual power of the Jew. In this ritual, the Noahide is compared with the animal sacrifices that Jews used to bring to the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Noahides may “inspect” themselves by offering prayers of repentance during the last four days of the penitential month, the same four days when animal sacrifices were “inspected” for blemishes by Jewish priests.

While from the perspective of Jewish law it is clear that a Noahide is a gentile who observes the seven laws, the content and form of Noahidism as a practice-based faith has yet to be developed and standardized. In response to this lack of content, and the Filipino Noahides’ requests for more ritual life, rabbis in Israel are writing new rituals that reflect the Jewish calendrical cycle but maintain a clear boundary line between Noahides and Jews. This can again be observed in the Noahide Sabbath ritual. Like Jews, Filipino Noahides observe a 24-hour period of rest, from sunset on Friday to sunset Saturday. However, their rabbinic mentors have specifically forbidden them from observing the Jewish ritual of Shabbat, because Shabbat is a divine commandment specific to the Jewish people under the Mosaic covenant. Instead, Noahides are permitted to wish each other a “happy seventh day,” to gather in community, pray, and share meals. Emmanuel explained the reasoning to me. “We cannot sanctify the Sabbath or bless the wine like Jews. We cannot say ‘Shabbat shalom.’ But as the rabbi explained to me, we can have a day of rest because it is just a natural human need to have a day of rest. But it is not Shabbat.”

To celebrate their “seventh day of rest,” the Noahides in Lamac gather on Friday night for a communal meal in their finest clothes and Jewish-style head coverings. Together they carry out a ritual created for them by rabbis from the Hasidic Chabad movement. The ceremony begins with the lighting of seven candles representing the seven laws of Noah, followed by a blessing of the bread, and the song *Eshet Chayil*

("Woman of Valor"), a poem of praise from the Book of Proverbs (31:10–31) traditionally sung by Jewish men to show appreciation for the mother of the family and her domestic labor performed during the week. At the Friday meal in Lamac, a recorded Hebrew version of *Eshet Chayil* was played through speakers attached to a phone. As the song played, the families gathered around their mothers and embraced them, sobbing collectively in an intimate and cathartic state of spiritual connection. As a Jewish observer, I was quite surprised to witness this interpretation of *Eshet Chayil*. The upbeat and playful table song that my family sings on Friday nights was transformed into a devout prayer and climactic moment of the Noahide Sabbath ritual. I expressed my confusion to Emmanuel and asked him why this particular Jewish song has become so meaningful to the Noahides in Lamac.

You know that we cannot keep the Shabbat like you. So the rabbis gave us permission to sing this song. They said that we could have this one song for the woman because it does not mention Shabbat specifically. So we call it our Woman of Valor ceremony. All week long the men may yell at their wives or become angry but this is their chance to apologize and to honor the mother of the household.

After the Woman of Valor ceremony, I had the chance to chat with one of the village mothers, a woman in her early 50s named Dolores, who was part of the original Sacred Name Believer group that worshiped in the cave synagogue in the 1990s. I asked Dolores if the community did a similar Friday night ritual in the cave. "No! In the cave we were really observing Shabbat! We were cooking all of the food before sunset, just like Jews, and then we would pray and sing together in the cave. You could feel the presence of God in that cave." I asked Dolores if she missed celebrating Shabbat or if she felt that the new rituals were fulfilling enough. "Do I miss it? Yes, I miss the Shabbat. But it is forbidden for us to act like Jews. We know that now from the rabbis. What we did before was a big mistake. There are many things forbidden to us now," she explained with a sigh and a look of frustration.

Diego, the community leader, similarly hinted at the inadequacy of new Noahide rituals being handed down by the rabbis through Emmanuel. "Personally, I will say we need more ritual. It is not enough, just the seven laws. What do I do to bury my dead? For the birth of my baby? If you ask me in my heart, I want to be converted [to Judaism]. I feel that being a Noahide is just for today."

During my time in the Philippines, a longing for authentic Judaism continued to surface during interviews. Some informants expressed their feeling that Noahide rituals seemed like watered-down versions of the true Jewish rituals they longed to access. Leon, a wealthy lawyer belonging to the Mandaue City community, explicitly stated that he felt

he was being discriminated against, discouraged from conversion, and purposely denied access to Jewish tradition for racial reasons. He explained that, as an educated man, he was well aware that any person, regardless of ethnic background, can become a Jew, and that he did not believe that Jews were a racially superior people. He also explained that Orthodox conversion requires considerable financial resources to relocate and live with an observant community, and that this option is simply not available to most Filipino Noahides. Financial obstacles aside, he said he was unsure why the rabbis specifically wanted them to remain as Noahides and develop new Noahide rituals rather than help convert them to Judaism.

In contrast to Leon, the other educated, middle-class informants from Cebu that I spoke with did not feel as bothered by the inaccessibility of Jewish conversion, often explaining that they simply felt “it was not their place to convert.” They reiterated the same ideas stressed by Emmanuel and his rabbi mentors, that Jews and Noahides are meant to serve different roles in the world and their categorical difference is part of “God’s plan” for humanity. Most of my informants claimed they had no problem with embracing a new faith in which they were fundamentally unequal to the Jewish people, because Noahidism allowed them to enter into the Jewish story, to have a part in the Torah via the Noahide covenant, and a place in the “world to come.”

In our final interview, I confronted Emmanuel about his lecture on Jewish spiritual supremacy and the looming conversion question. I asked him why Noahides shouldn’t just convert to Judaism. “Convert? How? They can’t even afford a candle. How can they get kosher food here in the Philippines?” But more importantly, he reiterated, was the fact that Noahides and Jews were actually “created by God to have separate roles.” According to Emmanuel, this division represents the natural and correct order of the world as God created it. This reasoning is pervasive among the religious Zionist rabbis working with Noahides that I interviewed from 2014–2017, while conducting my dissertation research on the Third Temple Movement. While there are different factions of rabbis working with Noahides (and often competing for Noahide loyalty), there is an important ideological consensus among them: the majority believe that Jews and Noahides represent two essential categories of humanity, each with a particular role to play in rebuilding the Temple and bringing the Jewish messiah. This ideology is again reflected in the name of one popular francophone Noahide network that calls itself *Reconstruire les 70 nations*. This online Noahide community promotes the idea that the “original” 70 nations that descended from the sons of Noah should be reconstituted as Noahide nations in order to bring the messiah, reinforcing the idea that there are essential primordial nations and national identities with divinely sanctioned roles to play in the impending messianic world order.

TRANSNATIONAL MESSIANIC ALLIANCES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In 2014, a teenage Noahide from Zamboanga fell victim to a spirit possession that caused him to “float” and “scale the walls like a lizard,” as witnessed by some 300 community members. When Emmanuel heard about the spirit possession event (a common occurrence during his father’s tenure as leader of the Sacred Name Believers), he immediately began contacting his rabbis in Israel, inquiring as to the proper Jewish traditions for spirit exorcism. Most of his mentors did not take him seriously. They told him that Judaism does not deal with such things and that the afflicted young man should be taken immediately to a medical professional.

Unable to cure the young man through medical doctors, Emmanuel continued to reach out to rabbis abroad. Eventually one Israeli rabbi, a prominent Noahide proselytizer with ties to the Third Temple Movement, sent him a vial of “Temple Incense,” a mixture of spices the ancient Israelites burned in the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to God. This particular “Temple Incense” was purchased in Jerusalem at the gift shop of the Temple Institute, the leading Third Temple organization in Israel that also receives funding from various state ministries and financial support from Christians and Noahides abroad. In its gallery in the Old City of Jerusalem, the Institute showcases its plans for the Third Temple, which it hopes will replace the Haram ash-Sharif compound and Al-Aqsa Mosque when Israel gains control over the Temple Mount. When Emmanuel received the incense in the mail, he took it to the Zamboanga Noahides, who proceeded to burn it and recite Kabbalistic prayers they found on the Internet. After a few days, the young man was completely cured.

The Third Temple incense, which left the gift shop in Jerusalem and crossed the globe from Israel to the Philippines, was a physical manifestation of the hybridization of messianic worlds brought into dialogue through new Internet pathways. The incense was also a representation of what happens when cultural gaps and theological impasses arise during this hybridization process. The temple incense constituted a transnational ritual improvisation, a creative solution to resolve the contestation that occurs when contemporary Orthodox Judaism and indigenous Filipino beliefs eventually meet.

CONCLUSION

As an anthropologist, I am studying global Noahidism because I am interested in what Noahides can teach us about religion in the twenty-first century, and the ways in which spiritual and political projects weave

together on the Internet, crossing national, ethnic, and economic class lines. The new spiritual and political tapestry that is Noahidism must be analyzed in relation to neo-colonial relationships, racial ideologies, and gendered power structures, as male rabbis from the first world craft a new religion for Noahides in the global south. Will one community's quest for spiritual fulfillment become another's tool for religious and nationalist conquest? As Filipinos attempt to access Judaism through their new Noahide faith, their theocratic mentors continue to lay the foundations for a biblical Torah state in Israel. Together, they are united in their desire to usher in messianic times and actualize Jewish prophecy. This emerging alliance of religious Zionism in Israel with the international Noahide community allows us to track the evolution of Jewish nationalism on a global scale, as messianic Zionism inspires conversion and new forms of religious life abroad.

ENDNOTES

¹ Jayeel S. Cornelio, "Institutional Religion and Modernity-in-Transition: Christianity's Innovations in Philippines and Latin America," *Philippine Studies* 56, no. 3 (2008): 345–58; Christl Kessler and Jürgand Rüland, "Responses to Rapid Social Change: Populist Religion in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 1 (2006): 73–96; Gerry M. Lanuza, "The New Cult Phenomenon in Philippine Society," *Philippines Studies* 47, no. 4 (1999): 492–514.

² There is no one specific place where the seven laws of Noah are listed in the Torah. These laws were derived by rabbinic commentators from different passages in Genesis and codified in the "Oral Torah" (Talmud) as the seven laws incumbent upon Noah and his descendants after the flood.

³ See for example Maimonides' discussion of Bnei Noah in his *Mishneh Torah*, often cited by rabbis as an authoritative text on the role of Bnei Noah in the messianic era.

⁴ A more detailed history of Noahidism and its contemporary evolution can be found in Rachel Feldman, "The Bnei Noah (Children of Noah)," World Religions and Spirituality Project, 8 Oct. 2017, <https://wrldrels.org/2017/10/08/the-bnei-noah-children-of-noah/>, accessed 21 March 2018.

⁵ Johnathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe, eds., *Philosemitism in History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶ Thomas J. Csordas, ed., *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 2–20; Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding, "Bad Endings: American Apocalypse," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (1999): 285–310.

⁷ Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to The Children of Noah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

⁸ Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Motti Inbari, *Jewish*

Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?, trans. Shaul Vardi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

⁹ Elsewhere, I track the increasing popularity and mainstreaming of the Third Temple Movement in Israel since 2011. For example see Rachel Z. Feldman, “Putting Messianic Femininity into Zionist Political Action: The Race-Class and Ideological Normativity of Women for the Temple in Jerusalem,” *The Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 13, no. 3 (2017): 395–415.

¹⁰ Donny Fuchs, “The Sons of Noach: Genuine Righteous Gentiles Revisited,” Jewish Press, 19 Oct. 2017, <http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/columns/fuchs-focus/the-sons-of-noach-genuine-righteous-gentiles-revisited/2017/10/19/>, accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

¹¹ The Temple Institute, which held its Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration with Noahides in Dallas (2012), donated funds to support the Temple Institute’s activities in Jerusalem.

¹² Filipino Noahides are often cited as the largest group worldwide, but there may in fact be more than 2,000 Noahides in the United States. While physical communities do exist and worship together in the American Southwest, most American Noahides participate in Noahidism through online groups, making it difficult to calculate exact membership numbers.

¹³ The Filipino economy relies on the migrant labor of Filipinos who work abroad and send money home. There are approximately 10 million Filipinos working overseas.

¹⁴ Chabad rabbis are typically sent around the world as emissaries to build Jewish communities and bring more secular Jews into observant life. However, since the early 2000s they have increasingly devoted resources to building Noahide communities in Europe and across the global south.

¹⁵ I have assigned pseudonyms to all informants except those who are part of Noahide leadership and can easily be identified online.