

# Academic Study Of Religion

## **The Academic Study of Religion: Perspectives, Methods, and Insights**

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive overview of the academic study of religion, exploring its diverse methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and key areas of inquiry. It examines the evolution of the field, highlighting the contributions of various disciplines and perspectives, while acknowledging ongoing debates and challenges within the academic study of religion. We will delve into the crucial distinction between theological and academic approaches, analyzing how each contributes to our understanding of religious phenomena.

### **1. Introduction: Defining the Academic Study of Religion**

The academic study of religion is a multifaceted and rapidly evolving field, encompassing a wide range of approaches and methodologies. Unlike theology, which focuses on the affirmation and interpretation of specific religious beliefs, the academic study of religion employs a critical and objective lens to examine religious phenomena across cultures and historical periods. This involves studying religious beliefs, practices, institutions, and experiences without necessarily subscribing to or rejecting any particular faith. The goal is to understand religion as a complex social and cultural phenomenon, analyzing its impact on individuals, societies, and the world at large.

## **2. Historical Development of the Academic Study of Religion**

The academic study of religion, as a distinct field of inquiry, emerged gradually over centuries. Early contributions came from scholars of comparative religion, such as Max Müller in the 19th century, who sought to understand the similarities and differences between various religious traditions. The rise of anthropology, sociology, and history in the 20th century profoundly influenced the development of the academic study of religion, leading to the emergence of specialized subfields such as the anthropology of religion, the sociology of religion, and the history of religions. Each discipline brought its unique theoretical frameworks and methodologies, enriching the field and fostering interdisciplinary dialogue. The establishment of dedicated departments and programs in Religious Studies further solidified the academic study of religion's status as a legitimate and rigorous area of scholarly pursuit.

## **3. Key Approaches and Methodologies within the Academic Study of Religion**

Several prominent approaches characterize the academic study of religion. Phenomenology of religion emphasizes the lived experience of religious belief and practice, seeking to understand the essence of religious phenomena. History of religions employs historical methods to analyze the development and evolution of religious traditions over time. Anthropology of religion explores the relationship between religion and culture, analyzing the role of religion in shaping social structures, identities, and practices. Sociology of religion investigates the social dimensions of religion, studying its impact on social organization, social change, and social inequality. Theological approaches, while distinct from the purely academic study of religion, often inform and interact with it, particularly in areas like biblical studies and historical theology. Finally, critical religious studies employs critical theory to analyze power dynamics, social justice issues, and the role of religion in perpetuating inequalities.

## **4. Major Themes and Debates in the Academic Study of Religion**

The academic study of religion engages with a wide range of compelling themes, some of the most important being:

**Secularization:** This debate examines the purported decline of religious influence in modern societies. The academic study of religion critically analyzes the various dimensions of secularization, considering its social, political, and cultural implications.

**Religious Pluralism:** The increasing diversity of religious beliefs and practices in contemporary societies presents challenges and opportunities for the academic study of religion. Understanding the dynamics of religious pluralism and the coexistence of different religious traditions is a crucial area of research.

**Religion and Violence:** The role of religion in violent conflict is a complex and controversial topic requiring careful and nuanced investigation. The academic study of religion seeks to understand the

interplay between religious beliefs and violent actions, avoiding simplistic causal explanations.

**Gender and Religion:** This area focuses on the study of gender roles, gender identities, and the experiences of women and men within religious traditions. The academic study of religion critically examines how religious doctrines and practices shape gender relations.

**Religion and Politics:** The complex interplay between religion and politics is another significant theme. The academic study of religion explores the influence of religious beliefs and institutions on political systems and processes.

## **5. The Importance of Interdisciplinary Approaches in the Academic Study of Religion**

The strength of the academic study of religion lies in its interdisciplinary nature. By integrating insights from various disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism, scholars gain a more holistic and nuanced understanding of religious phenomena. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a richer and more comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between religion and other aspects of human life. Furthermore, it fosters critical self-reflection within the field, constantly challenging assumptions and refining methodologies.

## **6. Challenges and Future Directions in the Academic Study of Religion**

The academic study of religion faces ongoing challenges. One challenge is the need to maintain methodological rigor while remaining sensitive to the ethical implications of studying religious beliefs and practices. Another challenge involves navigating the complexities of religious diversity and avoiding generalizations that fail to capture the nuances of specific religious traditions. Future directions in the academic study of religion likely include greater engagement with global religious phenomena, further development of interdisciplinary approaches, and increased attention to issues of social justice and religious pluralism. The role of digital technologies and online religious communities also represents a significant area for future research within the academic study of religion.

## **7. Conclusion**

The academic study of religion offers a vital contribution to our understanding of human experience, culture, and history. Its critical and objective approach, combined with diverse methodologies and interdisciplinary collaborations, provides valuable insights into the complex nature of religious belief and practice. By engaging with the ongoing debates and challenges within the field, scholars continue to refine our understanding of religion's enduring influence on individuals, societies, and the world at large. The future of the academic study of religion promises to be rich with new perspectives, methodologies, and discoveries, enriching our capacity to understand the human

condition in its multifaceted complexity.

## FAQs

1. What is the difference between theology and the academic study of religion? Theology seeks to understand and interpret religious beliefs from within a specific faith tradition, while the academic study of religion approaches religion as a social and cultural phenomenon, employing objective and critical methods.
2. What are the major methodological approaches used in the academic study of religion? Major approaches include phenomenology, history of religions, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, and critical religious studies.
3. How does the academic study of religion contribute to interfaith dialogue? By providing a framework for understanding diverse religious traditions objectively, the academic study of religion promotes mutual respect and understanding, fostering productive interfaith dialogue.
4. What is the role of secularization in the academic study of religion? The study of secularization examines the changing relationship between religion and society, exploring its impact on religious institutions, practices, and beliefs.
5. How does the academic study of religion address issues of religious violence? Scholars analyze the complex interplay between religious beliefs and violent actions, seeking to understand the social, political, and historical factors contributing to religious conflict.
6. What is the importance of gender studies in the academic study of religion? Gender studies examine the role of gender in shaping religious beliefs, practices, and institutions, highlighting the experiences of women and men within religious traditions.
7. How does the academic study of religion engage with religious pluralism? Scholars examine the coexistence and interaction of different religious traditions in contemporary societies, exploring the challenges and opportunities of religious diversity.
8. What are some current challenges facing the academic study of religion? Current challenges include maintaining methodological rigor, addressing ethical considerations, and navigating the complexities of religious diversity.
9. What are some future directions in the academic study of religion? Future directions involve increasing engagement with global religious phenomena, expanding interdisciplinary collaborations, and focusing on issues of social justice.

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**academic study of religion: What Is Religion?** Aaron W. Hughes, Russell T. McCutcheon, 2021 Controversies over how to define the word religion have persisted for decades. It is a term of art and of academic study, but also one of governance, technologies, and of networks; it is a concept whose diversity is often its own worst enemy. Religion is as much a fuzzy set of conceptualizations and generalizations about a range of human activities as it is an authorizing system of persons, ideas, and practices. What is Religion?: Debating the Academic Study of Religion invites readers to eavesdrop on scholarly debates over the limits of, and uses for, a word commonly used but infrequently defined in a precise manner. This volume takes the temperature of the modern field of Religious Studies by inviting a diverse group of scholars to offer their own substantive contribution that builds on the shared opening prompt, Religion is.... Their essays document the current state of the field and its various sub-fields, assess the progress that has been made over the past generation, and propose new directions for future work. Seventeen of the international field's leading scholars show how they work with each other's definition, or, sometimes, the lack of a definition. Of interest to students, scholars, and general readers alike, What is Religion? will provoke debate and provide insights into the state of the field.

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**academic study of religion: NVMEN, the Academic Study of Religion, and the IAHR** Tim Jensen, Armin Geertz, 2015-11-24 Nvmen publishes papers representing the most recent scholarship in all areas of the history of religions ranging from antiquity to contemporary history. It covers a diversity of geographical regions and religions of the past as well as of the present. The approach of the journal to the study of religion is strictly non-confessional. While the emphasis lies on empirical, source-based research, typical contributions also address issues that have a wider historical or comparative significance for the advancement of the discipline. Numen also publishes papers that discuss important theoretical innovations in the study of religion and reflective studies on the history of the discipline. Brill is proud to present this special volume of articles compiled to celebrate the occasion of the 60th anniversary of NVMEN: International Review for the History of Religions in 2014. The articles in this volume have been selected under the auspices of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), and reflect critically on the past, present, and future of NVMEN, the IAHR and the study of the History of Religions.

**academic study of religion: Critical Thinking and the Academic Study of Religion** Richard Penaskovic, 1997 Originally Published by Scholars Press Now Available from Duke University Press This work responds to a renewed emphasis on teaching in the academy. Written from the perspective of a classroom teacher, it is a practical application of the principles behind the critical thinking movement to the study of religion. Emphasizing that the acquisition of critical thinking depends less on what is taught than on how it is taught, the author presents concrete examples from his own experience to illustrate a student-centered approach to teaching. By demonstrating how the study of religion contributes to the development of critical thinking--through the acquisition of problem-solving, decision-making, and metacognitive skills--Penaskovic suggests its value to a broader liberal arts curriculum as well. Both a theoretical view of critical thinking and a nuts-and-bolts manual on how it can be used and assessed in the classroom, this work will challenge new and veteran teachers alike to reexamine and renew what they do in the classroom.

**academic study of religion: Academic Study of Religions in a Cognitive, Anthropological and Sociological Perspective** Tomáš Bubík, Jakub Havlíček, Silvie Kotherová, Dušan Lužný, Rudolf Havelka, 2021 The book deals with current issues of the study of religion as an academic discipline, especially cognitive, anthropological and sociological research of religious thought and behaviour. Publikace pojednává o aktuálních problémech religionistiky jako akademické disciplíny, zejména pak o kognitivním, antropologickém a sociologickém výzkumu náboženského myšlení a chování.

**academic study of religion: Integrative Religious Education in Europe** Wanda Alberts, 2012-02-14 This book is a contribution to the development of the young discipline of the didactics of the Study of Religions (Religionswissenschaft) in international perspective. Integrative religious

education refers to education about different religions in classrooms with children of various religious and non-religious backgrounds. Cornerstones of recent debates about theory and methodology in the academic study of religions and in education are discussed in the first chapter. They form the basis of the following analysis and evaluation of current approaches to integrative religious education in Europe, with a special focus on England and Sweden. Particular attention is paid to the different underlying concepts of religion, education and ways of representing religious plurality in these approaches. Building on a discussion of the current situation of teaching and learning about religions in schools in Europe in the context of wider cultural, social and political debates, the book concludes with the suggestion of a framework for integrative religious education in Europe, from a perspective that combines insights from the study of religions and education.

**academic study of religion: Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Opened** , 2015-03-31 Studying Religions with the Iron Curtain Closed and Open. The Academic Study of Religion in Eastern Europe offers an account of the research focused on the origins, development and the current situation of the Study of Religions in the 20th century in countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Ukraine, and Russia. Special attention is devoted to the ideological influences determining the interpretation of religion, especially connected with the rise of Marxist-Leninist criticism of religion.

**academic study of religion: A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion** Craig Martin, 2017-04-21 A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion introduces the key concepts and theories from religious studies that are necessary for a full understanding of the complex relations between religion and society. The aim is to provide readers with an arsenal of critical concepts for studying religious ideologies, practices, and communities. This thoroughly revised second edition has been restructured to clearly emphasize key topics including: Essentialism Functionalism Authority Domination. All ideas and theories are clearly illustrated, with new and engaging examples and case studies throughout, making this the ideal textbook for students approaching the subject area for the first time.

**academic study of religion: Failure and Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion** William E. Arnal, Willi Braun, Russell T. McCutcheon, 2014-09-11 Failure and Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion presents a provocative critique of the unwillingness of modern scholars to publically distinguish research into comparative religion from confessional studies written within denominationally-affiliated institutions. The book offers the 19th Century founders of the study of religion as a bracing corrective to contemporary timidity. The issue was analysed and documented by Wiebe a quarter of a century ago. Here, marking Wiebe's work, a wide range of contributors reassess the methodology and ambition of contemporary religious research. The book argues that conceptualizing religion as part of the world of human action and experience is the first requirement of the study of religion.

**academic study of religion: Introduction to the Study of Religion** Hillary P. Rodrigues, John S Harding, 2023-11-07 The thoroughly updated second edition provides an engaging introduction to the discipline of religious studies. Summary boxes, discussion questions, a glossary, a chronology of key figures and texts and other pedagogic aids help students grasp key concepts.

**academic study of religion: Religion Enters the Academy** James Turner, 2011-03-15 Religious studies—also known as comparative religion or history of religions—emerged as a field of study in colleges and universities on both sides of the Atlantic during the late nineteenth century. In Europe, as previous historians have demonstrated, the discipline grew from long-established traditions of university-based philological scholarship. But in the United States, James Turner argues, religious studies developed outside the academy. Until about 1820, Turner contends, even learned Americans showed little interest in non-European religions—a subject that had fascinated their counterparts in Europe since the end of the seventeenth century. Growing concerns about the status of Christianity generated American interest in comparing it to other great religions, and the resulting writings eventually produced the academic discipline of religious studies in U.S. universities. Fostered especially by learned Protestant ministers, this new discipline focused on

canonical texts—the “bibles”—of other great world religions. This rather narrow approach provoked the philosopher and psychologist William James to challenge academic religious studies in 1902 with his celebrated and groundbreaking *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

**academic study of religion: *The Science of Religion: A Defence*** Donald Wiebe, 2018-10-16 Donald Wiebe, Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Trinity College, University of Toronto, has spent much of his academic career arguing for a clear demarcation between Theology and Religious Studies. *The Science of Religion: A Defence* offers a brilliant overview of Professor Wiebe's contributions on methodology in the academic study of religion, of the development of his thinking over time, and of his intellectual commitment to 'a science of religion'. The work is divided into three parts. The first part identifies pertinent connections between 'religion', 'religious studies', and 'science' and why 'reductionism' in the academic study of religion, when properly applied, can bridge the explanatory gap between the sceptic and the devotee. The second part treats conceptual debates in the academic study of religion, with particular reference to the place of 'belief', 'understanding', and 'meaning' in the modern study of religion. The third part addresses the theological resistance to the scientific study of religion and how that resistance can be overcome. Finally, two new essays are included: a critique on 'The Preconceptions of a Science of Religion' by Anthony J. Palma, and an accompanying reply by Donald Wiebe. *The Science of Religion: A Defence* is an essential resource for both scholarly and non-scholarly audiences alike, and will be of particular interest to both defenders and critics of a scientific study of religion.

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**academic study of religion: *The Study of Religion*** George D. Chryssides, Ron Geaves, 2013-12-05 This updated textbook unravels the complex issues related to methodology and theory in the study of religion. It equips students with the knowledge needed for the academic study of religion, explaining the history of the methodology, including ideas of key theorists, and discusses key issues in the field, such as gender, phenomenology, and the insider/outsider discourse. Updated throughout, additional material includes: -New chapter on colonialism and post-colonialism -New chapter on insider/outsider discourse -Coverage of 'cyber-religion' and the internet as a research tool in religious studies Study and classroom features in each chapter include: -Chapter outlines -Case studies -Boxed key concepts -Discussion questions -Chapter bibliographies The text is illustrated throughout with 35 images, and extra resources can be found online, including additional coverage of 'levels of religion'.

**academic study of religion: *The Academic Study of Religion During the Cold War*** Iva Dolezalova, Luther H. Martin, Dalibor Papoušek, 2001 While the academic study of religion in the former Soviet Union had to contend with an official ideology of scientific atheism, such study in the West - particularly in the United States - was being (re)invented in the 1960s, during the very midst of the Cold War. The twenty-one contributions to this volume - by scholars from North America, Europe, Russia, and eastern Europe - examine the ideological and theological influences on the academic study of religion during the period from 1945 to 1989 and thus raise the question of whether an academic study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) might be defined in ways that avoid the extremes of both ideology and theology.

**academic study of religion: *Religion on the borders***, 2007

**academic study of religion: *Introduction to the Study of Religion*** Hillary Rodrigues, John S. Harding, 2024 Why do people study religion? How have they studied it in the past? How do we



study religion today? Is the academic study of religion the same as religious education? These and many other questions are addressed in this engaging introduction to the discipline of religious studies. Topics include: Definitions of religion Perspectives in the study and teaching of religion How religion began to be studied: Traditional perspectives--philosophical and theological How people experience religion: Perspectives in the study of religious consciousness and perception--phenomenological and psychological Studying religion within communities: Social and cultural perspectives--anthropological, sociological, political, and economic Judging religion: Critical perspectives--feminist approaches, the interaction of popular literature and religion Contextual perspectives--historical and comparative Themes, theories, and current directions This thoroughly updated second edition encourages students to think critically about the theories and methods presented. Students will find arguments for the strengths and limitations of these approaches, understand connections among religious studies and other intellectual movements, and develop their own ideas of how they might want to go about the study of religion. Summary boxes, discussion questions, a glossary, a chronology of key figures and texts, and other pedagogic aids help students grasp key concepts.

**academic study of religion: Why Study Religion?** Richard B. Miller, 2021 This book asks: Can the study of religion be justified? It poses this question on the view that scholarship in religion, especially work in theory and method, is preoccupied with matters of methodological procedure and thus inarticulate about the goals that can justify the study of religion and motivate scholarship in the field. For that reason, it insists, the field suffers from a crisis of rationale. The book identifies six prevailing methodologies in the field, each of which it critically examines as symptomatic of this crisis, on the way toward offering an alternative framework for thinking about purposes for studying religion. Shadowing these methodologies is a Weberian scientific ideal for studying religion, one that privileges value-neutrality. This ideal poses obstacles to making justificatory claims on behalf of studying religion and fortifies a repressive conscience about thinking normatively within the field's regime of truth. After making these points, the chapter describes the book's alternative framework, Critical Humanism, especially how it theorizes about the ends rather than the means of humanistic scholarship and offers a basis for thinking about the ethics of Religious Studies as held together by four values: Post-critical Reasoning, Social Criticism, Cross-cultural Fluency, and Environmental Responsibility. Ordered to such purposes, the book argues, the study of religion can imagine itself as a valuable and desirable enterprise so that scholars of religion can relax their commitment to matters of methodological procedure and avow the values of studying religion--

**academic study of religion: Religious Studies, Theology, and the University** Linell E. Cady, Delwin Brown, 2002-10-10 This collection explores the highly contested relationship of religious studies and theology and the place of each, if any, in secular institutions of higher education. The founding narrative of religious studies, with its sharp distinction between teaching religion and teaching about religion, grows less compelling in the face of globalization and the erosion of modernism. These essays take up the challenge of thinking through the identity and borders of religious studies and theology for our time. Reflecting a broad range of positions, the authors explore the religious/secular conceptual landscape that has dominated the modern West, and in the process address the revision of the academic study of religion and theology now underway.

**academic study of religion: Studying Religion** Russell T. McCutcheon, 2014-12-05 Widely used as a primer, a text and a provocation to critical thinking, 'Studying Religion' aims to develop students' skills. The book clearly explains the methods and theories employed in the study of religion. Essays are offered on a range of topics: from the history and functions of religion to public discourse on religion and the classification of religions. The works of key scholars - from Karl Marx, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Otto to Mircea Eliade, James G. Frazer, and Sigmund Freud - are analysed and explored. 'Studying Religion' represents a shift away from the traditional focus of describing the exotic or curious religious 'Other' to an examination of how religious behaviours and institutions are studied. The book will be invaluable to students of religious studies.

**academic study of religion: The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion** Michael Stausberg, Steven Engler, 2016 The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religions provides a comprehensive overview of the academic study of religions. Written by an international team of leading scholars, its fifty-one chapters are divided thematically into seven sections. The first section addresses five major conceptual aspects of research on religion. Part two surveys eleven main frameworks of analysis, interpretation, and explanation of religion. Reflecting recent turns in the humanities and social sciences, part three considers eight forms of the expression of religion. Part four provides a discussion of the ways societies and religions, or religious organizations, are shaped by different forms of allocation of resources (i.e., economy). Other chapters in this section consider law, the media, nature, medicine, politics, science, sports, and tourism. Part five reviews important developments, distinctions, and arguments for each of the selected topics. The study of religion addresses religion as a historical phenomenon and part six looks at seven historical processes. Religion is studied in various ways by many disciplines, and this Handbook shows that the study of religion is an academic discipline in its own right. The disciplinary profile of this volume is reflected in part seven, which considers the history of the discipline and its relevance. Each chapter in the Handbook references at least two different religions to provide fresh and innovative perspectives on key issues in the field. This authoritative collection will advance the state of the discipline and is an invaluable reference for students and scholars.

**academic study of religion: Vocabulary for the study of religion**, 2015

**academic study of religion: From Primitive to Indigenous** Professor James L Cox, 2013-05-28 The academic study of Indigenous Religions developed historically from missiological and anthropological sources, but little analysis has been devoted to this classification within departments of religious studies. Evaluating this assumption in the light of case studies drawn from Zimbabwe, Alaska and shamanic traditions, and in view of current debates over 'primitivism', James Cox mounts a defence for the scholarly use of the category 'Indigenous Religions'.

**academic study of religion: Method and Theory in the Study of Religion: Working Papers from Hannover** Steffen Führling, 2017-07-03 Since the downfall of the phenomenology of religion as the leading paradigm in the study of religion in the 1960s, theoretical and methodological discussions surrounding the nature and identity of the study of religion as an academic discipline have proliferated. The essays included in this volume approach these debates from a variety of angles. Based on a series of talks held at the University of Hannover over the last few years, the essays are intended to be understood as diagnostic works in progress and thus as working papers, all of which strive to point out important problems and perspectives in the field of theories and methodology and to draw attention to the future of the discipline. Using developments in Hannover as a launch pad, the volume forms the basis for further insights into the direction of the study of religion as a discipline at large.

**academic study of religion: The Study of Religious Experience** Bettina E. Schmidt, 2016 The renowned scientist Sir Alister Hardy approached the complex field of religious and spiritual experience in a similar disciplined and scientific manner in which he approached natural science. Asking people from the public to send him accounts of first-hand experiences with spiritual or religious powers, he established the Religious Experience Research Centre that has remained at the forefront of the academic study of religious experiences. This book will take his work forward and show how to study religious and spiritual experiences in the 21st century. The Study of Religious Experience aims to show how a range of disciplines - including anthropology, philosophy, religious studies, theology, biblical studies and history - approach the topic of religious experience, how this approach is applied and what contributions they make to the study of religious experience.

**academic study of religion: Studying Religion** Russell T. McCutcheon, 2024-01-22 Widely used as a primer, a class text, or just a provocation to critical thinking, Studying Religion clearly explains the methods and theories employed in the academic study of religion by tackling the problem of how scholars define and then study religion. Written for all newcomers to the field, its brief chapters explore the three main ways in which religion is defined and, along the way, also consider a range of

related topics, from the history and functions of religion to its public discourse, religion in the courts, and the classification of diverse groups into world religions. The works of classic and contemporary scholars—from Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud to Bruce Lincoln and Naomi Goldenberg—are analyzed and explored in readable chapters and detailed supporting materials. *Studying Religion* represents a shift away from the traditional descriptive and comparative approach and, instead, uses the study of religion to invite readers to consider how they divide up, name, and come to know the world around them. This edition also includes a new final chapter, *Identification Matters*, adding to the case studies included throughout this book to present a collection of contemporary instances where different approaches to defining and studying religion make it possible to study other issues of contemporary relevance, including those involving gender, race, and the rights of indigenous peoples. The new chapter makes explicit the practical topics of identity and status that have always been implicit throughout the entire book, bringing into the classroom a wide variety of timely and relevant topics that can be better understood by its approach. This book therefore remains invaluable to all students of religious studies—whether in the introductory class or as an example of an alternative way of approaching the field.

**academic study of religion: *Relating Religion*** Jonathan Z. Smith, 2004-11-10 One of the most influential theorists of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith is best known for his analyses of religious studies as a discipline and for his advocacy and refinement of comparison as the basis for the history of religions. *Relating Religion* gathers seventeen essays—four of them never before published—that together provide the first broad overview of Smith's thinking since his seminal 1982 book, *Imagining Religion*. Smith first explains how he was drawn to the study of religion, outlines his own theoretical commitments, and draws the connections between his thinking and his concerns for general education. He then engages several figures and traditions that serve to define his interests within the larger setting of the discipline. The essays that follow consider the role of taxonomy and classification in the study of religion, the construction of difference, and the procedures of generalization and redescription that Smith takes to be key to the comparative enterprise. The final essays deploy features of Smith's most recent work, especially the notion of translation. Heady, original, and provocative, *Relating Religion* is certain to be hailed as a landmark in the academic study and critical theory of religion.

**academic study of religion: *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*** Russell T. McCutcheon, 1999-01-07 Thirty classic and contemporary readings - from such writers as Kant, Hume, Schleiermacher, and Otto, to Ninian Smart, Mircea Eliade, Karen McCarthy-Brown, and Wendy Doniger.

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**academic study of religion:** Considering Comparison Oliver Freiberger, 2019-01-02 The comparative method is an integral part of religious studies. All the technical terms that scholars of religion use on a daily basis, such as ritual, hagiography, shrine, authority, fundamentalism, hybridity, and, of course, religion, are comparative terms. Yet comparison has been subject to criticism, including postcolonialist and postmodernist critiques. Older approaches are said to have used comparison primarily to confirm preconceptions about religion. More recently, comparison has been criticized as an act of abstraction that does injustice to the particular, neglects differences, and establishes a mostly Western power of definition over the rest of the world. In this book, Oliver Freiberger takes a closer look at how comparison works. Revisiting critical debates and examining reflections in other disciplines, including comparative history, sociology, comparative theology, and anthropology, Freiberger proposes a model of comparison that is based on a thorough epistemological analysis and that takes both the scholar's situatedness and his or her agency seriously. Examining numerous examples of comparative studies, *Considering Comparison* develops a methodological framework for conducting and evaluating such studies. Freiberger suggests a comparative approach - which he calls discourse comparison - that confronts the omnipresent risks of decontextualization, essentialization, and universalization. This book makes a case for comparison, arguing that it is indispensable for a deeper analytical understanding of what we call religion. The book is intended to enrich the practice of both aspiring and seasoned comparativists, stimulate much-needed further discussions about comparative methodology, and encourage more scholars to produce responsible comparative studies.

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offers a thorough but concise body of material suitable for introductory courses on the study of religion, or to provide theoretical context for survey courses. Study questions and worksheets can be found on the book's webpage.

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