

# INTRODUCTION

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As stated in the introduction to Volume 1, *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* aims to be “interdisciplinary and international in scope, ‘ecumenically’ encouraging contributions from scholars of diverse religious and ideological orientations, and theoretically eclectic rather than committed to a particular school of interpretation and explanation.”

The papers in this volume vary significantly in topic, method, and scope. The fifteen authors draw on their extensive backgrounds in sociology, psychology, linguistics, religious studies, theatre, political science, and anthropology. Religion in Asian, African, and North American settings is addressed with attention given to Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Zoroastrian, mystical, New Age, and animistic belief, practice, and experience. The articles include extensive literature reviews and theoretical developments as well as reports based on ethnographic research, survey and interview data, archival research, and linguistic analysis. They reflect the diversity of methods creatively used to investigate religious phenomena.

In their in-depth review, Thomas Robbins and David Bromley provide support for the idea that new religious movements (NRMs) in the United States sustain settings for social and religious experimentation. They focus their review upon NRMs’ innovation in sexual patterns and gender roles and in strategies for resource mobilization and organizing. Such social innovation, the authors suggest, make NRMs significant, regardless of their degree of growth or their level of immediate and direct impact on modern society.

The relationship between new church development and denominational growth is examined by Penny Long Marler and C. Kirk Hadaway. In this highly informative, comparative study, they examine church planting and denominational growth in five major U.S. religious bodies over nearly four decades. The interesting findings of their analysis add a significant empirical advancement to the church planting literature that has profound practical implications for denominational leaders and theological educators.

Roger L. Dudley, Edwin I. Hernandez, and Sara M.K. Terian share the results from their ground-breaking study of the political beliefs and practices of Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) in the United States. The researchers compare survey respondents' political attitudes with several religiosity indices and interpret the results in light of SDA teaching and culture. They provide stimulating interpretation and useful research directions for the comparative study of political inconsistency among religious groups.

Douglas Liechty Caskey addresses the significance of oral Bible reading in Mennonite worship by examining current and historical Anabaptist worship practices. He grounds his analysis and interpretation in the cultural performance frameworks of anthropologists and folklorists and offers suggestions on how such frameworks could be sharpened. His research suggests several dimensions through which the centrality of scripture in Mennonite subcultures may be examined and reinforced in contemporary worship.

Within a socially, economically, and ethnically heterogenous community in Sri Lanka, Neville Singamkutti-Arachchige-Don examines the nexus between religious behavioral adaptation and microlevel political action. In addition to political involvement and affiliation, he addresses relationships between popular religious belief and practice, on the one hand, and economic success, poverty, perceived chance events, and the loss of power, on the other. Although he does not directly address the political conflict of his nation, his findings provide an important element for understanding it.

Peter Hill and Rodney Bassett strengthen the bridge between social psychology and the psychology of religion by applying and comparing four major attitude-behavior models (reasoned-action, BAV, process, and elaboration likelihood) to religious experience and conduct. Their analysis is thorough and clear. Research dealing with religious attitudes will benefit from their interpretation and application of these central attitude theories.

A. Javier Trevino argues that the international Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) organization is an example *par excellence* of religion as a collective representation, depicted by sociologist Emile Durkheim in 1912. Trevino unpacks the way in which AA combines religious faith and secular morality with practices consistent with Durkheim's ideas on the origins of religious thought and organization.

Through ethnographic and linguistic examination, Ernst R. Wendland carefully unpacks the idea of evil held by the Chewa people of South-central

Africa. He describes the roles of witchcraft and sorcery that support the concept of *ufiti* and then relates this central cultural notion of evil to the interpersonal, institutional, moral, psychological, ideological, economic, and political functioning of the Chewa.

Helen Ralston briefly examines the role of religion among South Asian immigrant women in Atlantic Canada. She finds that religion is a very important contributor to the reconstruction of personal and social identity, to maintaining a minority culture that is distinct from the majority, and to transmitting the parental cultural identity to children.

In the volume's final paper, Janet Liebman Jacobs reports the findings of her exploratory study of mystical religious experience and gender differences. She identifies three types of mystical experience—integrative consciousness, divine intervention, and divine presence—and concludes that significant differences indeed exist between women and men in their experiences of religious phenomena. Such differences, she suggests, emanate from socially created gender distinctions in industrial society and give rise to a new theory of spiritual consciousness and human relationality.

Each contribution to *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* is refereed carefully, typically by at least three reviewers. These referees invariably provide extensive and valuable suggestions for the improvement of individual papers. We are grateful to the fifty reviewers who evaluated the ten papers accepted for this volume; their names are listed at the back of the book. Special acknowledgment is also given to Betty Anderson for her exacting editorial assistance throughout the year and to Holly Brown and Marilyn Williams who contributed many hours of careful, professional word processing.

There are numerous implicit and explicit suggestions for further research and theoretical elaboration in these papers. We hope that they, along with the references cited and the indexes of subjects and names, will contribute to further investigations in the social scientific study of religion. Even abstruse topics mentioned only in passing often suggest significant and interesting subjects and issues that deserve research attention and subsequent publication.

Inquiries and suggestions about possible contributions or topics may be addressed to either editor. Manuscripts to consider for future volumes may be submitted in quadruplicate at any time. Send them to Monty Lynn, *RSSSR* Coeditor, Department of Management Sciences, Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX 79699-8325 USA.

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