

**Textbooks for teaching the sociology of religion**  
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**Abstract**

The sociology of religion, a vibrant sub-discipline of sociology, is popular amongst students taking degrees in Sociology, Theology, and Religious Studies. Teachers are often not sociology specialists and seek a standard text to help with classes. Others, who specialise in sociology, have usually no background in the study of religion. His review surveys the field of books recommended by teachers and students and finds few to wholly recommend. The author calls for texts to be more inclusive, less dogmatic, and more directed to best pedagogical practice.

**Keywords**

Sociology of religion; undergraduate; textbooks

The term ‘textbook’, here in the title, perhaps implies a standard, a fixed set of rules or guidelines; not qualities that tend to be embraced by contemporary sociology scholars. But then, some scholars do not much like books at all. More than once, I have heard it said: ‘why write (or read) a book when a journal article will do?’ That opens the question: what is it a textbook about the sociology of religion can, and, should, do? And what is it we expect our students to do with it? The length of a monograph (typically 70–90 000 words) is necessary to accomplish a detailed and nuanced task; some would argue for textbooks to be much longer. A journal article presenting a specific range of data may succeed in transmitting key points of information but is usually directed towards professional scholars who are familiar already with their field and have embedded, implicit knowledge. A book, however, can develop argument and evidence for the non-specialist reader, particularly undergraduates, providing the necessary description to enliven ideas, offer in-depth knowledge from numerous sources and even disciplines, create a comparative, problematising schema and suggest several ways forward. Those who teach students to question, engage critically, and develop independent thinking about their subjects will usually need a book to illustrate those techniques and shift students from wanting ‘facts’ and ‘truth’ to demanding context, contour and questions. Indeed, it is often argued that sociology is a product of modernity, where the plausibility of truth claims has been eroded. A good sociology textbook should, therefore, present competing claims and theories. When reviewing book proposals for publishers, I have seen definitions of ‘textbooks’ as a book that introduces students to a new subject, and therefore covers all the material considered to be essential for an understanding of the subject. Straightforward as that appears, it is important to remember that someone, the author at least, is making judgements about what is ‘essential’.

## Choosing sociology of religion text books

This article is similar to other such articles in Religion, where scholars are invited to write about the ‘textbooks’ they would recommend for teaching certain aspects of religion. The initiative began in 2013, with Religion editors announcing it while also noting the ambiguity of nomenclature (Stausberg and Engler 2013, 131): there are few advanced textbooks for students studying religion compared to other subjects, and neither is there a sharp distinction between textbooks and introductory overviews (or, I would add, ‘readers’ or ‘handbooks’).

There are several good ‘handbooks’ for the sociology of religion, with chapters written by contemporary eminent and well-known scholars in the field. Those with strong introductory chapters and section commentaries are most useful to students. For reasons of space, and to keep this article’s focus on ‘textbooks’, only one such handbook is reviewed here. Although Woodhead and Heelas’ *Religion in Modern Times: an Interpretive Anthology* (2000) ranges well outside the sociology of religion, it meets the high standard of detailed editorial engagement we (Day and Coleman 2016) observed in Lambek’s (2008) anthology: clear, engaging writing style covering important themes and scholars. In making our selection for a review of anthropology textbooks (Day and Coleman 2016), we chose those that we and our colleagues felt served their purpose well because they offered a broad, and epistemologically transparent, grounding in the subject. When exploring the books for this review, I asked colleagues at work, at conferences, and in teaching positions at a range of universities worldwide for their recommendations of contemporary textbooks (notwithstanding their use of classic works of Weber, Durkheim, Marx and others). Further, I examined course reading lists available online, and reflected with my students on what had been useful, or not, and why.

Most colleagues said they didn’t know of any ‘textbooks’, and several added that they felt a ‘textbook’ was something appropriate for secondary school students, not those in graduate education, who should be reading primary works. They were able to suggest several key books they felt were essential and helpful to students. Several of the same books re-appeared in these conversations over the past two years and have been reviewed here. Geography played some part, revealing differences in the United States and the rest of the world. The criteria, however, were much the same, even as the content and method varied: teachers and students seek well-structured, engaging books that inform both theoretically and empirically, invite questions and discussion, illuminate methods, and excite a sociological imagination.

The empirical and theoretical picture is complicated and requires a re-evaluation of some of the classics. As Dillon (2003, 3) observed: ‘That the continuing significance of religion in late modern society was not anticipated by classical social theorists and is at odds with much of contemporary theory is due to many factors’. Many proponents of secularisation theses expected societies to reflect more ‘reason’ and instrumentalised rationality than has been the case.

The existence or otherwise of gods is not our domain of enquiry, as Dillon (2003, 7) discusses. She positions religion as an empirically observable social fact: ‘Sociologists of religion are not concerned with inquiring into whether God exists or with demonstrating the intellectual compatibility of religion and science’. She (Dillon 2003, 6) (in concert with many anthropologists and historians), points out that the experience of religion and

reason are not necessarily opposed, but religious belief and experience are located in overlapping, interdependent domains of the rational and non-rational.

The intertwining of religion and reason in everyday life also means, for example, that although many Americans express belief in God and the afterlife (e.g., Greeley and Hout 1999), this does not necessarily mean that they anticipate actually having an afterlife and, in any case, may go about their daily activities with a certain religious indifference. Religion matters in many lives and, in public culture but it is not the only or the most important thing and its relevance ebbs and flows relative to what else is going on. In short, across the diverse personal and institutional contexts of daily life reason and religion are sometimes coupled and sometimes decoupled.

Dillon's comments may open disciplinary questions of the differences between religious studies and sociology of religion. Having worked in both fields, as have many scholars, I would not want to be overly pedantic about a purported distinction. For the purpose of teaching sociology of religion, I have sought materials that engage with religion as a social fact, produced by society, affected by and affecting social structures and institutions. A final criterion for the purpose of this review was to speak to Religion's international base. I have therefore chosen texts from several geographic regions. They are presented here in alphabetical order by author.

**Alan Aldridge: *Religion in the Contemporary World: A Sociological Introduction* (2013), 3rd edition [1999], Cambridge: Polity. (250 pp)**

The book's sociological tone is set from the beginning, with the first pages devoted to an important sociological question: what are the implications for society of including a question about religious identity on a national census? That example allows Aldridge, a UK scholar of cultural sociology, to unpack skilfully the fraught task of defining religion, particularly as illustrated by two excellent examples, Scientology and the Baha'i faith. The book's structure follows the same pattern throughout posing a sociological question and then exploring plausible answers through reference to contemporary examples and influential theorists. Throughout the book, empirical data are broad, international and interesting enough to capture students' attention.

Chapter material is organised according to key ideas and questions. For example, the first chapter 'Defining Religion: Social Conflicts and Sociological Debates', is followed by two on the topic of secularisation: 'Secularization: the Social Insignificance of Religion?' and 'Secularization Challenged: A New Paradigm?'. Other chapters, about new and transformed religions, are titled with sociological questions. The chapter 'Dangerous Religions? Sects, Cults and Brainwashing' is followed by 'Dangerous Religions? Fundamentalism'. Other chapters consider civil religion, gender and sexuality, the 'spiritual revolution' and diversity.

One of the strengths of this book is the author's even-handed approach. He does not overly emphasise any one idea or theorist that happens to match his own interest or point of view; rather he briefly summarises debates and then succinctly synthesises the main points. His own critique frequently peppers the text, but only after the key idea or text has been neutrally discussed. His conclusion to a section on the 'clash of civilizations', for example, is pointed (Aldridge 2013, 214): 'It is hard to see in Huntington's discussion any serious recognition of the contribution that Islam has made to Western cultures or any sensitivity to the elements of faith that they share'.

Each chapter has helpful in-text references corresponding to a composite bibliography, and also suggested ‘further reading’ at the end of each chapter. In conclusion, this is a sociologically informed, sensitive text that addresses the kinds of issues students grapple with when studying contemporary religion and does so by exploring not just case studies but relevant theoretical explanations. It could be improved by adding questions for student discussion and suggested activities. In common with all the other texts, its bibliography could be further diversified.

**Kevin J Christiano, William H. Swatos, Jr. and Peter Kivisto: *Sociology of Religion Contemporary Developments*, 3rd edition (2015), [2001]. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield. (410 pp.)**

This book primarily relies, as the editors explain, from data and argument sourced from the United States – an unnecessary limitation, I suggest, considering the rich global complexity of religion to which most students are exposed on an almost daily basis. Its parochial material and tone may rankle those outside the United States who object to the notion of American intellectual hegemony. Although it appears to incorporate ideas and data about the rest of the world, it does so in a way that places the American case as central and the rest as different and ‘other’. This presents perplexing questions: why, for example, would the authors decide that Islam be related to themes of ‘ethnicity’ but Christianity would not?

The other weakness is the editors’ rigid adherence to certain opinions, which makes the tone at times a little dogmatic. For example, rather than discuss the development and variety of secularisation theses, the editors reject secularisation theory outright, following instead a ‘new paradigm’ outlook of religious change and variety. Once again, this might be a popular theory within the United States, but scholars elsewhere tend to compare and contrast a variety of explanations for religious change.

The book situates the sociology of religion in a chronological frame, showing how religion captivated early sociological thinkers, such as Durkheim, Marx, Simmel and Weber. It proposes a distinction between Religious Studies and Sociology of Religion with which many scholars would take exception: Religious Studies scholars, they suggest, believe that there is an irreducible spiritual force in the universe, whereas, in their view, Sociology of Religion scholars are free of that assumption and only examine how people put their beliefs about the ‘sacred’ into action.

The third edition is livelier: text blocks are liberally inserted to break up pages, recent controversies are well-covered, such as the abusive behaviour of Catholic priests and subsequent Church cover-ups, and the final section explores neopaganism, gods and goddesses.

**Grace Davie *The Sociology of Religion: a Critical Agenda* (2013), 2nd edition [2007], London: Sage. (304 pp)**

This book, in its second edition, is an interesting and often challenging text. Students sometimes find it difficult to follow British sociologist Grace Davie’s wide-ranging and often equivocal style of writing. That has always been, in my view, both a great strength and occasional weakness in her oeuvre. Her attention to detail, nuance and imaginative

approaches require serious, patient attention. Teachers will likely find this more suited to advanced students. The strongest chapter in her text, ‘Methodological Approaches’, provides a good illustration as she says (Davie 2013, 112)

The initial task of this chapter is to bring together and exemplify (whenever possible with reference to material presented elsewhere in this book) the principal methodologies found in the sociological study of the religious field. The second, and perhaps more important, undertaking is to encourage more imaginative approaches to the gathering of data - to widen the range of resources and to think carefully about how the data that they yield can be incorporated into the sociological account.

Were it not for such imagination, the field would have been robbed of some of her most interesting insights – her ‘believing without belonging’ thesis, the argument that Europe is an ‘exceptional case’ in the process of secularisation and her work revealing ‘vicarious religion’. She urges students to avoid the ultimately pointless task of following a supposed scientific approach to religion: ‘the stress on scientific method has been counterproductive in that it rules out, almost by definition, the most interesting parts of the agenda’ (Davie 2013, 112). Davie draws a line between British researchers who valorise either qualitative or quantitative methods and who support either theories of secularisation or religious change. As she explains, large-scale surveys may provide useful correlations, but it is necessary to dig deeper to question, for example, the questions being asked, and their relevance to a variety of both religions and global regions.

The book is structured in two parts: ‘Theoretical Perspectives’ and ‘Substantive Issues’. It is useful to consider religion in those ways, allowing students to focus both on what religious actors are doing in the contemporary world, and why. Approaches such as secularisation theory, rational choice theory and theories of modernity get the full treatment, with Davie lending a light, yet consistent, critical touch, even when discussing her own personal favourites, such as multiple modernities. In her exploration of substantive issues, she covers mainstream religions, minorities, ‘fundamentalism’ and globalisation.

Like in most texts about religion, there tends in her book to be an implicit bias towards Christianity. Her chapter ‘Demanding Attention: Fundamentalisms in the Modern World’ is generally well received by students, both for its topical flavour and its balanced treatment. Students are sharply aware of the racist discourse surrounding popular representations of ‘extremism’ and terrorism. In lectures and seminars, they respond quickly to presentations illustrating how media and politicians persist in purveying stereotypical images: white men who massacre their families or schools are depicted as troubled, or lonely, with no reference to even their nominal Christian background, but anyone brown or black is immediately described as a terrorist, and invariably (often without any evidence) as a Muslim. Davie’s chapter provides an excellent response to that common binary. She not only locates a dramatic religious reemergence in, as most scholars do, the 1970s but pinpoints both the Iranian revolution and a new, politically oriented, Catholic Pope. She criticises scholars of religion for not anticipating those, and later, developments primarily because they were intellectually locked into a secularisation paradigm that claimed religion was diminishing in quantity and significance. Further, Davie applies her theories to secular, as well as religious fundamentalisms, citing as an example violent sections of the Animal Rights movements.

The index and bibliography are good, but with only two tables, the text would benefit from being broken up.

**Andrew Dawson: *The Sociology of Religion* (2012), London: SCM. (256pp).**

The book's premise framed at the outset is correct: many students studying religion are unfamiliar with sociology, and many studying sociology are unfamiliar with religion. Dawson then sets himself a daunting task, to speak to both audiences simultaneously. I think he succeeds, without being patronising to either. He observes that although more than a century ago religion commanded significant attention of major thinkers, in the latter part of the last century sociologists lost interest in what they thought was a dead subject. His description of a sociological orientation is something to which most students can relate (Dawson 2012, 7–8):

While a number of academics have contributed greatly to analysing the day-to-day interactions through which human beings construct their social world, what makes this analysis truly sociological is its theoretical linkage with broader concerns relating to the institutions and structures which frame all aspects of interpersonal encounter.

His ten chapters review the nature of thinking sociologically about religion, its classical theorists, debates about secularisation, ideology, gender, new religions, spirituality, fundamentalism, globalisation and market dynamics. Although writing from his UK base, his examples and theorists are international, and a particularly useful characteristic is his frequent references to the lineage of ideas and theories, thereby placing them in spatial and historical contexts. These are helpful for students who may be constantly nagged by teachers like me to be aware of the genealogies of the theories with which they are engaging. Dawson is careful to summarise and stress the sociological aspects of a particular theorist's work. His constant repetition of that aspect may seem obvious to more advanced students but is particularly welcome on introductory courses. He also, reassuringly, demonstrates he is up-to-date with recent developments.

The book has a good index and bibliography but, as with some many such works, could be usefully brightened by text boxes and illustrations. It would suit both beginners and more advanced students.

**Michele Dillon: *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. (2003), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (481 pp.).**

This comprehensive volume is more handbook than a textbook, but its reach and depth can make it an important contribution to teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Its 28 chapters are divided into six sections, the titles of which signify its sociological grounding: Religion as a Field of Sociological Knowledge; Religion and Social Change; Religion and the Life Course; Religion and Social Identity; Religion, Political Behaviour, and Public Culture; Religion and Socioeconomic Inequality. Authors are a roll call of the most important sociologists of that generation, whose chapters are sufficiently theoretical as well as empirical to be relevant today. (Dillon tells me that a revised version is not due imminently).

As she promises in her first chapter, Dillon has curated a compendium that pays close attention to the importance of religion in daily life, particularly about the rich diversity of practice, within a carefully constructed sociological frame. In commissioning the chapters, she asked the authors to avoid lengthy and sometimes dry literature reviews which might strive towards closure on any particular topic, and lean instead towards ambiguities, subtleties, and controversies. The chapters are well-written and accessible for even firstyear students.

A strength of the volume is the breadth of methods: interviews, surveys, and ethnographies, along with longitudinal, historical and observational approaches. This provides a valuable teaching resource for intermediate and advanced students interested in evaluating and perhaps conducting research.

The book is fairly gender-balanced, both by contributions (10 of the 28 are by women) and an extensive bibliography, with the material being US-centric, tending towards an American audience. Its in-depth incorporation of sociological theories, resources and language throughout make it suitable for students who are unfamiliar with sociology as well as those who may take a sociology of religion course amongst a wider sociological curriculum.

The detailed index will be useful for all students and teachers. There are no suggested class-based questions or activities.

**Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad: *An Introduction to the Sociology of religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives* (2006), Aldershot: Ashgate (now Routledge) (241pp)**

This text by two Norwegian scholars begins with probably the most contested question in the sociology of religion ‘Is it true that religion is weakening in modern times, or are we facing religious resurgence’ (Furseth and Repstad 2006, 2). One of the more interesting thoughts on that theme arises at the end of the chapter on religion and gender.

Perhaps, they suggest, people who live outside traditional family units, still held to be almost sacred by traditional religions, are able to ‘negotiate and create a sphere of action for themselves, accompanied by new roles. In this way, they contribute to religious renewal and innovation’ (Furseth and Repstad 2006, 196).

Organised both by topic and summaries of key sociologists, the authors work with examples from a variety of religious traditions, rather than focus in depth on any. The book is, therefore, usefully, a textbook about ‘religion’, not ‘religions’ as it works across the broad category of religion rather than being an examination of individual religions’ distinct theologies and practices.

Beginning with definitions and discussions of sociology, the tone is set for a book firmly situated in sociology, rather than Religious Studies, Comparative Religion or Theology. They discuss definitions of sociology that are more actor-oriented, described as sociology from below, or structure-oriented described as a sociology from above – distinctions which relate to formulations of the weak or strong programmes of sociology. As they say, those two approaches feature in the sub-discipline sociology of religion as well – a useful distinction to bear in mind when exploring different people’s work. Other pertinent variations are between idealistic/materialistic, harmonic/social conflict, biological/genetic, essentialist/constructivist. Because sociology searches for secular, not religious, explanations for behaviour it will, as a discipline, have a secularising effect. And yet, the authors point out, sociology as a discipline has, since the Second World War, neglected

religion in favour of economy and politics. They add that another reason for this neglect may be that sociologists of religion have often been funded by churches and have therefore focused on church issues. Their goal in the book is to combine the sociology of religion with general sociology, sometimes by including sociologists who do not focus on religion but can help readers consider how religion can be studied sociologically. This is a particularly useful feature for programmes of study situated in sociology departments. They also offer useful thoughts on distinctions amongst other disciplines that study religion, with non-sociological disciplines being at times normative or more focused on the content of individual religions.

Chapters, extensively using international examples and theorists, cover sociological perspectives on religion, religion as a phenomenon, classical sociologists, religion in contemporary society and cultural analysis, the great narratives (modernity, postmodernity, globalisation and secularisation) religion in the public sphere, individual religiosity, religious organisations and movements, religion, social unity and conflict, race, ethnicity and religion, religion and gender, sociology, theology and religious faith.

One of the most useful chapters, given how often students raise the issue, is the last one: *Sociology, Theology and Religious Faith* (Furseth and Repstad 2006, 197–208). The authors ask if it is an advantage or disadvantage to be a religious person studying religion. They are right to point out that while similar questions arise in every empirical sociological study where the social actors may have a different interpretation from the social scientist, ‘the tension is intensified when the scholars claim that a phenomenon is a social product and the social actors believe that it is a message from God.’ (Furseth and Repstad 2006, 199). That does not mean, they argue, that the sociologist is value-free: ‘The home ground should represent neither an advantage nor a drawback’. It is therefore important to be aware of one’s own, often internalised, assumptions and biases.

The book contains a bibliography and index, but no suggested further readings or questions, and it best suited to advanced students who are already familiar with the sociology of religion and seeking a more international perspective.

**Keith A. Roberts and David A. Yamane. *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (2016) 6th edition [1984], Los Angeles: Sage (504 pp.)**

This textbook, in its sixth edition (its second with co-author Yamane), covers well the themes and questions that arise most frequently in undergraduate sociology of religion courses.

Its six sections provide chapters that are coherently linked. The first section covers definitions and general approaches to the sociology of religion, the second takes a macro view and focuses on the complexity of religious systems, the third shifts to a more micro perspective on the role of religion in individual lives, the fourth looks at religious institutions (with a brief but important foray outside the United States through the work of Eileen Barker on New Religious Movements), the fifth explores social inequality (with strong sections on race, gender and sexuality), and the final section centres on social change and religious adaptation (including co-author Yamane’s robust defence of secularization theses as ‘neosecularization’).

Chapters are carefully designed to provoke thinking, from the opening short ‘questions to ponder as you read this chapter’ through occasional text boxes of ‘Critical Thinking’

questions. Readers are often directed to on-line resources to complement the chapters' ideas, and the text is frequently broken up with text boxes, illustrations and photographs. Further teaching resources, including sample tests, activities, and video material can be found through a linked web site. The inclusion of both a subject index and a name index is an interesting and useful innovation.

This is an exceptionally well-written textbook, exhaustive in detail and with rigorous theoretical grounding. The major drawbacks, as with most US-based books, are its nearly exclusive focus on the United States and Christianity. And, in keeping with the disciplinary norm, it is dominated by male voices.

**Armando Salvatore. *The Sociology of Islam: Knowledge, Power and Civility.* (2016).**

**Publisher: Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell (327pp).**

Although there are several articles, and book chapters, that look at the 'sociology of' different religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Paganism, Salvatore's book deserves a brief mention here because it offers an orientation to studying both Islam and sociology of religion more generally. His 39-page introduction does double duty both as an exposition of the book's framework and a magisterial overview of the histories and approaches within sociology of religion and sociology more generally. By abstracting Islam from a wider sociology of religion, Salvatore (2016, 7) is able to draw attention to how sociologists comfortably conflate the category of religion with 'tradition', seen as juxtaposed to 'modernity', and operationalised through functionalism:

'Less functionalization means a greater focus on both the regularities and the unpredictabilities of what I will call the "knowledge-power equation", which substantiates the metainstitutional, creative, and "constellating" power of religion'. Rather than export standard sociological theories and categories to Islam, he wants to 'treasure the tensions and antinomies that underlie the originally Western, yet over time global, sociological project of modernity...' Salvatore (2016, 8).

Essential to his sociology of Islam, and the book's structure, is the concept of 'civility', understood not through what he describes as a narrow, politically-loaded Western view of civil society, but through a 'more malleable, yet historically sound and transculturally plausible, concept of civility' (Salvatore 2016, 4). Correspondingly, the book is structured into three sections: Patterns of Civility; Islamic Civility in Historical and Comparative Perspective; Modern Islamic Articulations of Civility.

The book does not offer the kind of rich, engaging ethnographic detail that promises to capture and retain students' attention, but as so many texts are Christian-oriented, either explicitly or implicitly, the introduction alone should be required reading for novice undergraduates, with the remainder more suited to those specialising in Islam at higher undergraduate, and post-graduate, levels.

**Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State (2011), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (374pp).***

Turner's critique of contemporary sociology of religion, first published as a journal article (Turner 2009) and then revised as the 'Introduction' here, rests on his declaration that the major issue 'confronting any understanding of religion in modern societies are all related

to globalisation' (Turner 2011, viii). The key word, and the book's limitation is 'modern'. Many may disagree and argue that the most significant religious schisms have all had to do with gender, power and sexuality. Turner attempts to address those issues within the context of globalisation, positioning, for example, attempts on regulating female dress codes as a product of multiculturalism. He minimises issues of religious violence and radicalisation in favour of those recognising a resurgence of religion and piety, particularly in urban settings, where cosmopolitanism and various forms of religious vitality run counter to secularisation theories.

Turner's main argument is that all religions have been influenced by consumerism, and rather than imagine a 'post-secular' world, he invites the reader to consider one where the distinctions between secular and profane have largely disappeared. Globalisation, through interconnectedness and the shrinking of time and space, produces, he suggests, genuinely new phenomena, demanding new definitions of religion, secularisation and the body. The first section examines in detail 'Theoretical frameworks: the problem of religion in sociology' through the work of Durkheim (Chapter 2), Weber (Chapter 3), Parsons (Chapter 4), Douglas (Chapter 5) and Bourdieu (Chapter 6). His in-depth coverage of each theorist provides students with a good overview of their theories, a link to importantly related commentaries, and Turner's own reflections. For example, when discussing Emile Durkheim and the classification of religion Turner usefully reviews Durkheim's theory in the context of later developments and critiques, principally through Turner's distinction between strong and weak programmes of sociology: the former, Durkheimian sociology, treats causality as a function of social structure and the latter allows for more individual interpretations of meaning. One aspect of Turner's discussion of Durkheim that is refreshing for contemporary students is how he identifies Durkheim as a critic of industrial capitalism and egoistic individualism.

His treatment of the anthropologist Mary Douglas is at times dismissive. While he agrees with her 'rules' about the body, particularly the understanding that 'the control of the body is always an expression of social control' (Turner 2011, 90), to then say that her analysis of dirt and pollution does not transfer well to 'modern' societies is to seriously underestimate current desires in many countries to rid societies of 'dirty' immigrants, and how her theories of pollution and anomalies help to explain those phenomena.

Turner describes Pierre Bourdieu's explicit work on religion as 'not very interesting' (Turner 2011, 108) but suggests his wider conceptual apparatus provides rich analytical frameworks for the study of religion, such as 'the idea of religious interests and the role of institutions in organising the field' (Turner 2011, 120).

In the second section, Turner discusses eight interlinked themes covering issues such as secularisation, multiculturalism, feminism, state regulation, consumerism, citizenship, and piety. All of those topics attract attention amongst students, especially as the discussion is generally well-grounded in sociological theory. His chapter on 'managing religions' is particularly well nuanced as it addresses state objectives to both expand and constrain immigration – a significant issue today.

Turner fails, however, to pay sufficient attention to gender and sexuality, and to women academics. To ignore the work of Nancy Ammerman and Meredith McGuire, for example, is mystifying when he claims he will attend to 'religion and everyday life'. He misses out many other women scholars whose work has been influential – Linda Woodhead (here only for her anthology and not for her work, with Paul Heelas, on the 'spiritual revolution',

or her own highly influential contributions to gender debates), Marie Cornwall and Eileen Barker, amongst others. While the book can serve as a useful text for advanced students, teachers must be willing to take a close read with them and help fill the many gaps in knowledge created by Turner's general neglect of important women theorists. There are no illustrations, chapter questions or suggestions for activities.

### **Conclusion**

The above exercise revealed the extent to which the 'sociology of religion' is likely best understood in two phases: the classics and the contemporary. There appeared to be little difference in the opinions of the above authors about the essence, or importance, of the 'classics', leading to a bias towards theories about secularisation and modernity. This may result in an over-reliance on last century, white, male theorists, particularly if we take seriously Stausberg's assertion that contemporary theories have not 'achieved the status of a classic theory in religious studies, i.e., a recurrent point of reference in scholarly discussions and syllabi' (Stausberg 2009, 8–9). I am not sure if this is a reflection of the theorists themselves, or an atrophying characteristic of a discipline whose gate-keepers (review boards, senior scholars) prefer to talk to and cite each other. Several recurrent points of reference in the sociology of religion do occur, and are shown consistently in the texts above, but remain controversial. As Stausberg and Engler said (2013, 131) when introducing this occasional series of review articles, introductory overviews 'provide basic information on a given topic (i.e., *what the respective authors consider most relevant.*)' (italics mine).

A new criterion that is gaining attention is what is sometimes known as liberating, or de-colonialising, the curriculum.<sup>1</sup> That means adding authors who have been historically muted: women, people of colour, scholars from emerging economies. The dominance of white men within the discipline, and higher education more widely, reflects gender and racial inequality more generally. The module content and reading list I created for the Goldsmiths' BA Religion was subjected – and rightly so – to that kind of scrutiny during the programme review process, and I am sure that the final version was better as a result. It did not mean removing authors, but actively seeking non-white men from the literature. Citations are political. Ahmed wrote (<https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/11/04/white-men/>), referring to a singular institution of 'white men':

Citationality is another form of academic relationality. White men is reproduced as a citational relational. White men cite other white men: it is what they have always done; it is what they will do; what they teach each other to do when they teach each other. They cite; how bright he is; what a big theory he has. He's the next such-and-such male philosopher; don't you think; see him think. The relation is often paternal: the father brings up the son who will eventually take his place. Patriarchy: it's quite a system. It works.

While some may cry 'political correctness!' the response is becoming equally vocal: if rebalancing the discipline to help erode two centuries of taken-for-granted male privilege is<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include initiatives such as Decolonise Sussex at the University of Sussex, or one of several projects to 'liberate the curriculum' (e.g. Goldsmiths, University of London; UCL; Royal Holloway, Leicester University). There have also been campaigns dealing with sexism in research, such as the Gendered Conference Campaign led by the Feminist Philosophers group (<https://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/gendered-conference-campaign/>).

‘politically correct’ then, yes. More importantly, if knowledge is primarily created by only one segment of society, then surely that knowledge needs to be reframed as ‘religion scholarship by and about white men’, rather than ‘religion’. It is early days for such an initiative, but the future looks promising as scholars increasingly interrogate their own hermeneutic frames.

Creating a more inclusive, less patriarchal, post-colonial and student-focused textbook will be an important project for me in future – primarily motivated by realising how little is currently available.

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