Definition of religion. Annotated bibliography. First part: General studies in English A - Cas

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Bibliography

1. "Religion." In. 2012. *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion. Volume XI Reg-Sic* , edited by Betz, Hans Dieter, Browning, Don S., Janowski, Bernd and Jingel, Eberhard, 31–55. Leiden: Brill.

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"2. Definition. For quite some time, the assumption that religion can be defined has been challenged. The definition of "as experiential encounter with sacred reality and the responsive action of the person affected existentially by the sacred" (G. –-> Mensching, RGG^3 [*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*] V, 1961, 961) has been countered by the assumption that "defining the concept and nature of religion" presents "an almost insoluble problem," apparently soluble only through a "subjective existential decision to affirm and embrace a transcendent, suprarational paradox that shatters all previous associations of ideas." Therefore: "An exemplary insight into the concept and nature of religion must be an existential and therefore passionately subjective, committed response to transcendence" (L. –-> Richter, *ibid* ., 969ff.). Anyone who cannot recall "powerful and impassioned religious excitement can hardly engage in the study of religion" (R. –-> Otto, 8).
Since the collection of 48 definitions of religion by J. H. –-> Leuba (*A Psychological Study of Religion* , 1912, appendix), which he listed under "intellectualistic," "affectivistic," and "voluntaristic" headings, with critical comments, many definitions have been proposed. Since Leuba, however, they have been replaced repeatedly by definitions that see religion as an experiential, formalized depth in an individual's life and an opening to the eternal in humankind (F. –-> Gogarten). One result of this desolate situation has been the proposal to do away with the term religion entirely (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Franz Tenbruck). Since this proposal will never be accepted, if only for reasons connected with the structure of the academic world, there will still be efforts to define the concept of religion. It cannot be homogeneous, given the difference between treating it simply as the "depth dimension in human beings" (which is everywhere the case) and conceptualizing it with reference to transcendence, however defined, or to the holy (–-> Sacred and profane) — despite the problems associated with that concept ([Wolfgang] Gantke). It is helpful to differentiate the concepts of religion and the holy, defining not religion (because there are many religions) but the holy as an a priori category or archetype. Even then, however, the category of "the holy" refers back to "the Holy One" of the Bible (Colpe, *Uber das Heilige,* 84). Although this proposal may not be adopted, at least it illustrates how both terms are rooted in the history of Judeo-Christian faith." (p. 32)

2. Akram, Muhammad. 2016. "Emergence of the Modern Academic Study of Religion: An Analytical Survey of Various Interpretations." *Islamic Studies* no. 55:9–31.
Abstract: "This paper discusses various interpretations about emergence of the academic study of religion in the modern world. It is viewed that the expansion of Europe and resultant engagement of European consciousness with religious and cultural otherness played a role. Internally, the Enlightenment movement had prepared ground for a critical and objectified gaze at the phenomenon of religion on the one hand while Romanticism had generated a kind of fascination for oriental religions and exotic cultures, on the other. Similarly, the Christian theology, which had already gone through transformation, is also linked to the whole enterprise either as a disciplinary other or as a participating actor. The paper shows that available interpretations of the development range from viewing it as an encroachment of the scientific project into the realm of religion to a marriage of convenience between science and religion. In the final analysis, an integrative and inclusive view of various interpretive narratives has been adopted. It is maintained that since the modern academic study of religion itself is characterised by diversity of approaches, theoretical perspectives, and regional contexts, therefore, heterogeneity of the narratives regarding its beginnings is but a logical consequence. Still, interrogation into these narratives is useful for better contextual understanding

of various epistemological and methodological inclinations prevalent in the academic study of religion in our own times."

3. Allen, Douglas. 2020. "Understanding Religion: Interpretation and Explanation." In *Explaining, Interpreting, and Theorizing Religion and Myth: Contributions in Honor of Robert A. Segal* , edited by Roubekas, Nickolas P. and Ryba, Thomas, 42–69. Leiden: Brill.
"Scholars of religion often adopt a clear-cut dichotomy between interpreting religion and explaining religion. On the one side, scholars identified with the nonexplanatory interpretation of religion are most often from the humanities and frequently adopt hermeneutical and phenomenological approaches.
However, such approaches to understanding religion by interpreting religious phenomena also include various scholars from diverse areas of religious studies, anthropology, theology, comparative philosophy, comparative religion, and other disciplines. The clear dichotomy between interpreting religion and explaining religion has usually been made by various scholars who claim to provide nonexplanatory interpretations in all or at least part of their scholarship.
On the other side, scholars identified with understanding religion by explaining religion tend to be from the social sciences and the natural sciences.
They claim to explain religion and religious phenomena by offering some psychological, sociological, historical, biological, or other naturalistic nonreligious explanation. The clear-cut dichotomy between interpreting religion and explaining religion has usually not been made by scholars on this side who claim that their explanations and explanatory interpretations are sufficient to understand religion, and there is no need for a separate, autonomous, methodologically protected, disciplinary, nonexplanatory interpretation." (p. 42)

4. Alles, Gregory D. 2005. "Religion [Further Considerations] " In *Encyclopedia of Religion. Second Edition. Volume 11* , edited by Jones, Lindsay, 7701–7706. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale.
"Winston King's entry in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* states well one classic position in religious studies: religion results from a particular kind of experience, which King calls "depth-awareness." Even at the time the encyclopedia first appeared, that position was fiercely contested. Indeed, certain characteristic fault lines run through King's account: the difficulty of denoting religious experience in a way that is not obscure ("depth-awareness") or circular ("religious experience is religious precisely because it occurs in a religious context"), for example, and the presence of two different treatments of experience—one in "Definitions" and "Distinguishing Characteristics of Religious Experience," the other in "The Sacred Experience"— separated from one another as far as possible, perhaps in order to hide the repetition.
Alternatives to this position were certainly available at the time. They included Melford Spiro's treatment of religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro 1966, p. 96); Clifford Geertz's account of religion as a system of symbols that integrate worldview and ethos; and Peter Berger's claim that religion is the highest order of legitimation available to human beings in protecting cultural constructs against the perennial threat of anomie. In the past several decades, however, scholarly attention has increasingly turned away from trying to conceptualize religion to reflecting on the act of conceptualization itself. One might say that it has turned away from treating *religion* as a thing to treating it as a word, concept, or category. At least three topics deserve consideration in this regard: the history of religion, strategies of definition, and the different discursive purposes that lead humans to conceptualize religion." (pp. 7701-7702)
References
Spiro, Melford. "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation." In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* , edited by Michael Banton. London, 1966.

5. Alles, Gregory D., Trompf, Garry W., Horyna, Bretislav, Fujiwara, Sakoto, Wheeler, Brannon, Ruff, Jeffrey C., Khan, Abrahim, and Chitando, Ezra. 2005. "Study of religion." In *Encyclopedia of Religion. Second Edition. Volume 13* , edited by Jones, Lindsay, 8760–8796. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale.
"The entries that follow treat the academic study of religion throughout the world. It has seemed expedient to divide the articles in terms of large geographical regions arranged alphabetically, but one should remember that these regions are themselves somewhat artificial. The entries seek to address how religious studies has come into being in different ways in different academic settings. They treat the contribution of scholars in each region to the study of religions that are found outside as well as within the regions. Thus, the entry on South Asia, for example, treats the manner in which South Asians have studied religions, not the study of South Asian religions. The remainder of this entry offers more general observations about the emergence of the study of religion, its development, and its methods." (p. 8761)

6. Alston, William P. 2006. "Religion (1967)." In *Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Second Edition: Volume 8* , edited by Borchert, Donald M. , 366–376. Detroit: Thomson Gale.
"This entry is not a survey of the various forms that “religion” has taken in human history; rather, it treats the nature of religion as a problem in the philosophy of religion.
It will be concerned with attempts to develop an adequate definition of religion, that is, to make explicit the basic features of the concept of religion." (p. 366)
(...)
"An adequate definition of religion should throw light on the sorts of disputes and perplexities that typically produce a need to define religion, such as disputes over whether communism is a religion, and whether devotion to science can be called a man’s religion. So long as we are dealing with definitions of the simplistic type that we have criticized, these problems are not illuminated. Each party to the dispute will appeal to a definition suited to the position he is defending, and since none of these definitions is wholly adequate, there is an irreducible plurality of not wholly inadequate definitions to be used for this purpose.
Person A, who claims that communism is a religion, will give, for instance, Caird’s statement as his definition of religion, and person B, who denies this, will choose Martineau’s. Obviously, the position of each is upheld by his chosen definition. Hence, it would seem that the only way to settle the dispute is to determine which is the correct definition. However, we have seen that this gets us nowhere; no such definition is wholly adequate." (p. 369)

7. Ames, Christine Caldwell. 2012. "Medieval Religious, Religions, Religion." *History Compass* no. 10:334–352.
Abstract: "This article sketches the most important shift in medieval religious history over the past few decades: the transition from ‘‘church history’’ to ‘‘the history of religious culture.’’ First, it surveys the field’s expansion of ‘‘the religious’’ beyond a clerical elite to a broad demographic of the faithful, and its interest in devotion and lived experience in ways that have produced more nuanced appreciation of the varieties of Christian orthodoxy. Second, it sketches how the religions falling under the aegis of medieval religious history have increased from Latin Christianity only to Judaism, Islam, Greek Christianity, and even to forms of religiosity identified as pagan. Third, it argues that regardless of the field’s many expansions and changes, scholars have tended not to make explicit the definitions of ‘‘religion’’ with which they work, and considers the ramifications and possible value of doing so."

8. Amsler, Monika. 2017. "How Could Religion Become A Category? Accounting for Classical and Fuzzy Logic in the Conceptualization of Religion." *Asdiwal. Revue genevoise d’anthropologie et d’histoire des religions* no. 12:38–51.
Abstract: "The Study of Religion faces continuous challenges regarding the comparative nature of the term « religion ».

So far, no definition has been offered that could account for its deficiencies. Moreover, for half a century now it was continuously argued that the term is inherently Christian (Protestant) and modern. Recent studies further claim that the use of « religion » as an analytical category should be abandoned. The present article asks how, in fact, « religion » could become a category and what role categorization came to play in the modern academy and in modern epistemology. It is demonstrated that the constant running in circles in the Study of Religion with regard to its own subject results from the lack of a true alternative to classical logic. Even though there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that classical logic has reached its limits as an epistemological auxiliary, postmodern logics do not differ substantially. This paper is a call for an active contribution of scholars of religion in the pan-academic quest for a true alternative to classical logic. In the Study of Religion a new logic should enable the concept of « transcendence without contrary » (Latour). To achieve this, a first step might be to drop the idea that religion is a category and, instead, work with time- and space-bound concepts."

9. Arnal, William E. 2000. "Definition." In *Guide to the Study of Religion* , edited by Braun, Willi and McCutcheon, Russell T., 21–34. New York: Cassell.
"Defining "Definition"
Surprisingly enough, the definition of religion has not been a consistent major concern either for students of specific religious traditions or for theorists of religion. We would expect, at least under ideal circumstances, that any academic inquiry would begin with a careful circumscription of its subject matter, not to mention an at least passing attention to the question why that subject matter is worth studying in the first place. In other areas of study these sorts of issues tend only to be neglected when the discipline is so firmly entrenched, institutionally and ideologically, that it does not even occur to anyone to ask the question of definition in the first place, as may be the case with Classics or English or History, for example. The study of religion, by contrast, is both a relatively new addition to the academic repertoire, and by no means has a secure position within the secular university curriculum (Juschka 1997; 5-10)." (p. 21)
(...)
"Instead, I think, the academic future of religion as a concept will need to focus on deconstructing the category and analyzing its function within popular discourse, rather than assuming that the category bas content and seeking to specify what that content is. This task has already begun to be undertaken, most successfully by Talal Asad (Asad 1993). Asad argues not only that the concept of religion as a universal entity is incoherent but, further, that past (or non-Western) forms of what we would identify as “religion” operated in terms of mechanisms and self-understandings that we no longer associate with religion as such. Instead, he argues, the concept of religion as we understand it (and hence, tend to define it) is a by-product of the special historical and political circumstances of Western modernity (Asad 1993: 28, 39-43, 47-48). (pp. 30-31)
References
Asad, Talal 1993 *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Juschka, Darlene 1997 “Religious Studies and Identity Politics: Mythology in the Making.” *Bulletin of the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 26, 1:8-11.

10. Arnal, William E., and McCutcheon, Russell T. 2013. *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of “Religion”* . New York: Oxford University Press.
"The following volume, then, aims to participate in, and to criticize, the emerging and increasingly productive discussion in our fi eld about the adequacy of “religion” as a concept, as an object of study. Our position, obviously enough, is that (1) the concept of religion is a survival, in the technical, anthropological sense and has thus outlasted its shelf life; that we would be better served setting aside not simply the word, but the very idea that it makes good academic sense to clump together, for description, analysis, or especially explanation, those diverse acts, institutions, objects, and claims that we normally call “religious.” But in addition, we are

arguing that (2) despite its apparently provocative nature, the academic scrutiny directed at religion in recent years has not yet sufficiently dispensed with the concept, either because its reasons for so doing are inadequate or incomplete, or because problematic associations with the word are addressed while leaving the core concept intact." (*Preface,* P. XIII)

11. Arnal, William E., and Vearncombe, Erin K. 2025. "Religious Inventions: Introduction." In *Religious Inventions: Ancient Mediterranean Practice and the Study of Religion* , edited by Arnal, William and Vearncombe, Erin K., 3–17. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
"The following collection represents the results of a six-year seminar on early Christianity, early Judaism, and the study of religion, undertaken by the Canadian Society for Biblical Studies (CSBS) from 2015 to 2021. The seminar was first proposed at the 2014 CSBS [Canadian Society of Biblical Studies] annual meeting at Brock University by Stephen G. Wilson, who coordinated the seminar for the 2015, 2016, and 2017 meetings, and successfully applied for a three-year renewal. The seminar was then coordinated by William Arnal and Erin Vearncombe in 2018, 2019, and – with 2020 skipped because of the COVID pandemic – 2021. The principal aim of the seminar (on which see Steve's original proposal, appended at the end of this introduction) was to explore how our thinking about Roman-era Christianity and Judaism could be enhanced, changed, or supplemented by framing our inquiry as part and parcel of the academic study of religion. Would doing so generate new kinds of questions? Would it preclude or de-centre other, more traditional, kinds of questions? Would certain kinds of data and arguments be foregrounded?" (p. 3)
(...)
"“Religion,” after all, is normally used as a high-level and quite abstract category, specific to no one culture or epoch. It draws together practices – ritual, discursive, and otherwise – from the entire breadth of human cultures and the entire depths of human history.7 If we are to speak of ancient Jewish or Christian ideas and behaviours as religious ideas and behaviours, we are inherently claiming that they are meaningfully and substantially akin to ideas held by and behaviours typical of societies and cultures geographically and temporally far distant from the Mediterranean world of two thousand years ago. This comparative interest should incline us, then, to explore our data in search of general patterns of human behaviour. In other words, what is specific and unique to ancient Judaism and Christianity, what is incomparable, comes to be of less interest to the religionist than what is shared with other cultures, periods, and traditions. One need not engage in specific and explicit acts of comparison with other religious forms from different cultures – though it helps. But a comparative orientation can be manifest, too, in simply identifying specific ancient Jewish or Christian practices with broader and more abstract categories: concepts like magic, sacrifice, literate specialists, costly signalling, economic exchange, and so on. (pp. 5-6)
(7) We leave aside for the moment the question – one explored in several of the chapters of this volume – whether this universal application of the concept of religion is accurate and appropriate. The point here is that the term is not normally used to refer to any one specific tradition but, rather, to gather together a variety of different cultural practices.

12. Astor, Avi. 2022. "Religion and its modifiers: making sense of the definition and subtypification of a contested concept." *Theory and Society* no. 51:213–232.
Abstract: "Despite the many definitions of religion offered over the years, religion as a general concept remains “essentially contested” and characterized by a multiplicity of competing definitions and applications. This, however, has not impeded the proliferation of new religious subcategories (e.g., new age religion, secular religion, civil religion, and cultural religion, among others) that challenge the boundaries of religion as conventionally conceived. This article examines the logics underpinning these conceptual innovations with the objective of enhancing reflexivity and clarifying the processes they aim to elucidate. Critically integrating

the writings of Weber and Wittgenstein on definition and classification, I advance a framework based on ideal typification and family resemblance which allows for the intelligibility and analytic utility of unconventional subtypes, even when premised on root conceptions of religion that lack precise boundaries and defining attributes. I show how the logics underlying these subtypes are not limited to specification, but also include looser forms of family resemblance. More generally, my analysis explores conceptual classification and innovation as analytic practices involving the identification and creative interpretation of similarities, affinities, linkages, and other kinds of relationships within the constraints of "language-games" relevant not only to academic debate, but also to more basic and quotidian structures of meaning."

13. Auffarth, Christoph, and Mohr, Hubert. 2006. "Religion." In *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* , edited by von Stuckrad, Kocku, 1607–1620. Leiden: Brill.
"a) But is there not, after all, something common to all religions—something that could be called 'religion'?"
(...)
"b) 'Religion' in the singular, as a general concept, first emerges—just as 'history' comes to replace 'histories'—in the late Enlightenment. 'Religion' was thought of as designating a 'whole,' imperfect in its respective phenomena, and deformed in its historical realizations. The normative aspect of this fiction of one religion impugns really existing religions in terms of a critique—and makes religion 'in itself ' unimaginable, since there exists no corresponding reality. On the other hand, this idea of the one religion—and (consistently enough) of the one God, revealed in the form of the respective gods, YHWH, the Christian 'God of love,' or Allah, supplies a utopian potential that—as in Lessing's parable of the ring (Nathan der Weise, Ger., "Nathan the Wise"; 1779)(3)—could be turned and applied humanly against any totalitarian appropriation, or attempted missionizing, of a tradition.
Furthermore, the concept contributes to a critique of Christianity in the sense that, since there is now a unitary history of religion, religion is conceptualized as developing in steps (→ Evolutionism): from (1) 'primitive' forms of fear of the dead, and of spirits lurking in every tree, spawn offspring of a nature religion or a 'primitive' → animism , to (2) national religion that can imagine God only if he battles for his people, and who takes his sacred dwelling place in the capital of the land, to (3) the world religions that conceive of God as dematerialized and spiritualized, and dwelling in transcendence.(4) Now Christianity has lost its exclusive position, indeed, and has been inserted into a global 'world history,' one that transcends the biblical—to the very point that imperialism can be grounded in religious terms.
And at the goal of its development stands the individual and his and her soul, in familiar communion, for which there was no more need of intermediaries (priests, sacraments)—the 'mysticism of modernity,' Protestantism in ideal form. Granted, this course opens the gates to other forms of a critique of Christianity, which conceptualize the 'religion of the future' pantheistically, monistically, or esoterically." (p. 1609)
(3) The parable of the ring, verses 395-545. On the future, cf. Niewöhner, Friedrich, *Veritas sive varietas. Lessings Toleranzparabel und das Buch der drei Betrüger,* Heidelberg 1988.
(4) This series ultimately goes back to Paul, *Rom* 1-3 (natural religion, religion of the law, religion of freedom).

14. Bailey, Edward I. 2003. "The implicit religiosity of the secular: a martian perspective on the definition of religion." In *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and the Secular* , edited by Greil, Arthur and Bromley, David G., 55–66. Oxford: Elsevier Science.
"Religion is seen, on almost all sides, as being about the secular. Its very sacraments are ordinary, or quasi-ordinary, bread, wine, water, behaviour, relationships, goals, life.

"Religion" and "religiosity" then (implicit or explicit) describe voluntary yet compelling "commitments," which are rarely if ever single and complete. It may be (rarely, if ever) completely absent from any life that is recognisably human, but that is another matter, for empirical investigation. The terms refer to a body's *intentionality* — be that body single or plural, and be the intention conscious or unconscious. Religion is, in a word, what is "most valued" — in intent and/or in practice. Such ways of life are called religious because they are true to a type which the monk personified.
Students of the human are wise to follow the popular suit, because "religion" supplies a lens which no self-contained secular approach can achieve. If it takes a truly religious person to understand a truly secular one (cp. Panikkar, 1973), so it may need a truly secular person to understand a truly religious one. United by their complementarity, neither makes sense (has meaning) alone." (pp. 65-66)
References
Panikkar, R. (1973). *Worship and secular man: An essay on the liturgical nature of man, considering secularisation as a major phenomenon of our times and worship as an apparent fact of all times: A study towards an integral anthropology* . London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

15. Balagangadhara, S. N. 1994. *The 'Heathen in His Blindness...' Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* . Leiden: Brill.
"The Structure of the Book
Consider the following three statements: (a) Christianity has profoundly influenced the western culture; (b) members from different cultures seem to experience many aspects of the world differently; (c) the empirical and theoretical study of culture in general and religion in particular emerged within the West.
In the present study, I try to show that these generally accepted truisms have implications for the conceptualization of religion and culture. More specifically, I argue two interdependent theses: first, that the constitution and identity of western culture are tied to the dynamic of Christianity as a religion; second, because of this, it is possible to provide a different description of non-western cultures and religion than those prevalent in the West. I plan to do this, among other things, by taking the Indian culture as an empirical example not only because I myself belong to this culture but also because India is supposed to rank first in terms of the number of religions it is alleged to have (Wilson 1978: 170).
My strategy will be the following. First, I shall argue that the common-sense wisdom about the universality of religion does not just rest on the results of research, but also supports them: the idea that religion is a cultural universal is also the foundation for empirical and theoretical enquiries into religion. I will suggest too that this peculiar circumstance has hardly caught the eye of the students of religion. Second, I try to shed light on this state of affairs: Why have generations of brilliant thinkers overlooked what, at first sight, looks like a massive exercise in *petitio principii* ?
I hope to accomplish my task in the twelve chapters that make up the essay. Each of these is a postulated landmark signalling a shift in the kind of argument to follow. They are, in a manner of speaking, guest houses built for the travel-weary." (p. 5)
References
Wilson, Edward O. 1978 *On Human Nature* . Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press

16. Barton, Carlin A., and Boyarin, Daniel. 2016. *Imagine no Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* . New Yok: Fordham University Press.
"Our readers will surely have noticed two "I's" in this book: two speakers with distinct voices but a perhaps surprising degree of agreement in substance between them. This book is the product of the confluence of two proj ects that we were working on respectively about five years ago. Barton was studying the Roman sacrificial system (to which she will now return), and Boyarin was tracing the genealogy of "Judaism" (to which he will now return).

At a certain point, reading each other's early drafts, we realized that the propaedeutic for both projects was similar: a close study of the ancient Latin and Greek terms later taken to mean "religion" was a necessary foundation for both our projects. Barton, a Roman historian, took on the Latin work. She had long wrestled with the meanings of *religio* in republican and imperial Latin. (Her enormous additional task for this book would be reading all of Tertullian.) Boyarin, a Talmudist, by default of having no Latin, took on responsibility for analyzing the Greek material, including (as he did not realize at the beginning) reading virtually all of Josephus in Greek. There followed several years of reading, research, constant discussion, and lively disputation until the theses of this book came together. The goal that we had in mind from the beginning was that this would not be a book with two voices, in the sense of two opinions that agree to disagree, but rather that we would talk and think over every point until, having taken into consideration the arguments of the other, we had attuned our views to a stage at which we could both be satisfied. We succeeded in that goal; whether we have succeeded in any other, we leave to readers to decide." (p. 211)

17. Bell, Catherine. 2006. "Paradigms behind (and before) the modern concept of religion." *History and Theory* no. 45:27–46.
Abstract: "This essay identifies five paradigms that are basic to understanding the historical emergence and uses of the generic idea of "religion" in the Christian cultures of Europe and America.
The spread of this concept has been sufficiently thorough in recent centuries as to make religion appear to be a "social fact," to use Durkheim's phrase, rather than so many cultural expressions and different social practices. The supremacy of Euro-American culture—and an academy still saturated with Christian ideas—has enjoined other cultures and forms of religiosity to conform to this idea of religion; for these cultures contentment with the status quo can vie with the anxieties of influence, including "modernization." The key paradigms discussed are the following: Christianity as the prototype; religion as the opposite of reason; the modern formulation of "world religions"; the cultural necessity of religion; and critical analysis of the Western "construction" of religion. These paradigms demonstrate the limits on theoretical variety in the field, the difficulty in making real changes in set ways of thinking, and productive foci for interdisciplinary methods of study."

18. ———. 2008. "Extracting the Paradigm—Ouch!" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 20:114–124.
Abstract: "Masuzawa's study unearths the founding genealogy of the study of religion, most pointedly the ubiquitous 'world religions' paradigm that shaped the study and teaching of religion well into our era. She reveals more self-conscious European agendas than those familiar from post-colonial research. The paradigms that effectively constructed the field of religious studies have now locked it into costly and contentious projects of divestment. Adding to Masuzawa's achievement by briefly assessing some other nested assumptions—beginning with Christianity as the prototype for the category of religion itself—this response intends to contribute to her project of historicizing our scholarly sensibilities."

19. Bellah, Robert N. 1964. "Religious Evolution." *American Sociological Review* no. 29:358–374.
Abstract: "Evolution in the sphere of religion is traced on three levels. First and most central is the evolution of religious symbol systems which are described as moving from "compact" to "differentiated." In close conjunction with this evolution religious collectivities become more differentiated from other social structures and there is an increasing consciousness of the self as a religious subject. Five ideal typical stages of development are posited but it is recognized that these stages are not inevitable, that there is a wide variety of types within each stage, and that actual cases present many important features which cannot be neatly characterized in terms

of any one stage. The close connection between religious evolution and other aspects of socio-cultural evolution is assumed but not explored."

20. Benavides, Gustavo. 2010. "Response: Theory, Quasi-theory and Pseudo-theory in the Study of Religion." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 22:207–219.
Abstract: "This paper offers a series of critical observations on the essays that emerged from the roundtable co-sponsored by the North American Association for the Study of Religion and the Critical Theory and Discourses in Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion. Rather than simply responding to each paper, the essay takes these essays to provide a small but suggestive window into the work of theoretically-minded scholars of religion."

21. Berger, Peter Ludwig. 1974. "Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* no. 13:125–133.
Abstract: "Scientific approaches to religion have always alternated between functional and substantive definitions of the field - that is, between defining religion in terms of its social or psychological functions and in terms of its believed contents. Recently there has been a predominance of functional definitions, as exemplified by Bellah, Geertz, and Luckmann. Quite apart from the scientific utility of these definitions, they have come to serve an ideological use - as a quasi-scientific legitimation of the avoidance of transcendence. This is in accord with a secularized *Zeitgeist* , but it threatens to lose sight of the very phenomenon of religion. To regain the phenomenon, what is required is a return to a substantive definition, an understanding of religion "from within." Schutz's analysis of "multiple realities" in human experience may serve as a useful starting point for this."
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Berger, Peter L., 1970 "The problem of multiple realities-Alfred Schutz and Robert Musil." Pp. 213ff in Maurice Natanson (ed.), *Phenomenology and Social Reality. Essays in Memory of Alfred Schutz* . The Hague: Nijhoff.

22. Bergunder, Michael. 2014. "What is Religion? The Unexplained Subject Matter of Religious Studies." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 26:246–286.
Abstract: "Religious studies cannot agree on a common definition of its subject matter. To break the impasse, important insights from recent discussions about post-foundational political theory might be of some help. However, they can only be of benefit in conversations about “religion” when the previous debate on the subject matter of religious studies is framed slightly differently. This is done in the first part of the article. It is, then, shown on closer inspection of past discussions on “religion” that a consensus capable, contemporary, everyday understanding of “religion,” here called Religion 2, is assumed, though it remains unexplained and unreflected upon. The second part of the article shows how Religion 2 can be newly conceptualized through the lens of Ernesto Laclau’s political theory, combined with concepts from Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, and how Religion 2 can be established as the historical subject matter of religious studies. Though concrete historical reconstructions of Religion 2 always remain contested, I argue that this does not prevent it from being generally accepted as the subject matter of religious studies. The third part discusses the previous findings in the light of postcolonial concerns about potential Eurocentrism in the concept of “religion.” It is argued that Religion 2 has to be understood in a fully global perspective, and, as a consequence, more research on the global religious history of the 19th and 20th centuries is urgently needed."

23. ———. 2021. "Global Religious History in Theory and Practice." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* no. 33:441–462.
Abstract: "“Global religious history” derives its name from the German phrase “globale Religionsgeschichte”. This term articulates an approach that aims to be relevant to the whole field of religious studies, and it encompasses theoretical debates, particularly in the areas of postcolonialism and gender studies. Thus, “Global” embodies, acknowledges, and incorporates all prevalent terms of and the

parameters for the global constitution of present-day academia and society. “Religious” means that it concerns religious studies. “History” denotes a genealogical critique as the central research interest. Historicization in that sense is not limited to philological research of sources from the past but also relevant to any research based on data from contemporary anthropological fieldwork or other empirical methods. This approach also aims to provide a pertinent influence on research practice, and seeks to circumvent any artificial segregation of theory and practice."

24. Beyer, Peter. 1998. "The Modern Emergence of Religions and a Global Social System for Religion." *International Sociology* no. 13:15–172.
Abstract: "The article posits that central to contemporary notions of religion and religions has been the gradual development of a differentiated global social system for religion that manifests itself in a plurality of mutually distinguished religions. What counts as religion within this globalizing system and the globalized cultural model for what constitutes a religion are both the product of a highly selective historical process. The presentation of the hypothesis has three parts: a look at the historical development of a particular notion of religion and religions in the context of modern Western Christianity, an analysis of religion that adapts concepts from Luhmannian systems theory to argue that systemic religion uses binary codings as strategies for closure or recursiveness, and an examination of how other religions around the world have formed or not formed according to the systemic and cultural model of what a religion looks like. Throughout all the sections, the concern is not only with the existence of this religious system and its structure, but also with its fragility. The article concludes with implications of the hypothesis for research."

25. ———. 2003. "Conceptions of Religion: On Distinguishing Scientific, Theological, and "Official" Meanings." *Social Compass* no. 50:141–160.
Abstract: "Relatively recent efforts in the past decade by a variety of scholars to situate the conceptualization and study of religion more solidly in social and historical contexts have once again raised the question of whether the notion of religion is not fundamentally misleading as a scientific concept and should therefore be abandoned or at least severely circumscribed. The foundation of these critiques in, roughly speaking, sociology of knowledge approaches to religion suggests that they might well have significant implications for the basic orientations of the sociology of religion to its primary object of study. The aim of this article is to examine these more recent critiques of the concept of religion and then to outline a reorientation of the conceptualization of religion to take them into account. To this end, it suggests that the familiar distinctions between functional/substantive definitions and restrictive/expansive approaches be supplemented with a three-part typology of theological, scientific, and official conceptualizations of religion. These are derived from an analysis of the basic social-systemic structures of modern and global society."

26. ———. 2003. "Defining Religion in Cross-National Perspective: Identity and Difference in Official Conceptions." In *Defining Religion: Investigating the Boundaries Between the Sacred and the Secular* , edited by Greil, Arthur and Bromley, David G., 163–188. Oxford: Elsevier Science.
"The central hypothesis that I defend is as follows: the intractable debates about the proper definition of religion occur against the backdrop of the historical and global emergence of a differentiated institutional domain for religion. The debates are in fact a reflection of that development because it is, I contend, the societal system for religion that constitutes a kind of preponderant, if often implicit, model in the context of which most scholars carry out their observations. One can, for theoretical, political, and theological reasons criticize this model, even rail against its legitimacy; but, as a socially constructed reality that is real in its consequences, it cannot simply be declared an ideological error or a fantasy of the orientalist eye. I do not thereby deny that “religion,” like every other word or category, is always an observer’s abstraction, given reality only through its use in social communication.

But that merely underscores the importance of the social-communicative context for understanding why certain conceptions, certain terms and their meanings, come to be treated as real, even as self-evident. In presenting this argument, I give the critics of the notion of religion their due: one can rightly speak of the "reification" of religion, of its status as a tool of imperialist power and as an orientalist projection. These developments and uses, however, do not detract from the social reality of this religion. Nor do they vitiate the scientific utility of the concept. Rather, they underline that reality and that utility, while at the same time pointing to their utter contingency: religion could also be and could also have been something different, or not at all. It is neither an ineluctable essence nor an illusory manifestation (cf. van der Leeuw, 1967), neither sui generis nor simply cultural imposition. Instead, religion is in today's world a contingent and frequently highly contested social construction from which scientific, theological, and other observers can and do nonetheless abstract." (pp. 165-166)
References
van der Leeuw, G. (1967). *Religion in essence and manifestation* . J. E. Turner (Trans.). Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.

27. ———. 2006. *Religions in Global Society* . New York: Routledge.
"The heterogeneity of religion, the contested nature of the category as to what it means, what it includes and what it implies in the contemporary context, calls for ways of observing religion that focus explicitly and precisely on the peculiarity of the notion in that setting. That sort of observation, a theoretical account of religion in today's global society, is the central focus of this book. My aim is to offer a way of understanding the variety and the contradiction, of comprehending religion as form and function, as mainspring of power, conflict and cohesion, as social resource and social problem; but only in contemporary global society. To date, scholarly work that has focused on religion as a whole has tended to construct theories that seek to encompass religion – however defined more precisely – in all times and places. Such a 'universal' theory of religion is not my purpose here. Instead, mine is a descriptive and historical task, not one of universal typology let alone sociological law and prediction. Although I work with a host of generalized sociological concepts, I claim validity for them only as reflective of a particular historical situation, the globalizing society of the present and recent centuries. My effort does not pretend to be a theory of religion for all times and societies. To be sure, nothing stops it from being applied to these other situations, but it is not for them that the theory is constructed." (p. 2)

28. Beyers, Jaco. 2017. "'Fathoming Religion Studies: Treading on the spider's web." *Verbum et Ecclesia* no. 38:183–302.
Summary "Any attempt at understanding religion proves to be a perilous undertaking. Understanding Religion Studies as it is envisioned to function in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria already implies some perils. To fathom the breadth of Religion Studies is like treading on a spider's web: There are so many interconnected elements related to this field of study. The metaphor of a spider's web is utilised to portray the interconnectedness of religion to other elements. Kobus Krüger's concept of conditionality is utilised to describe this interrelatedness. There are many possible approaches to studying religion. This research highlights the anthropological, philosophical and sociological approaches. The relationship between religion and several other disciplines (i.e. education, law, science, politics and economy) is illuminated.
Religion Studies at the University of Pretoria should be aligned with the postcolonial demands for a particular way of doing research in Africa."
References
Krüger, J.S., 1982, *Studying religion: A methodological introduction to science of religion* , University of South Africa, Pretoria

29. ———. 2017. "A historical overview of the study of theology of religions." *HTS Theological Studies* no. 73:1–18.

Summary: "A brief overview is given by the editor of the development of the discipline of theology of religions to indicate how in a postmodern era an almost non-foundational approach has become evident. For a Christian understanding of interreligious relations an understanding of the origin of religion (theology of religion) is just as important as a theological evaluation of the relationship between religions (theology of religions). In this first chapter, a historical overview of the way in which Christianity thought about its relationship with other religions (especially with Judaism and Islam) is presented. Over history, three distinct phases can be identified, namely, (1) a Golden Era during which the main theories of interreligious relations were formulated (namely exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism), (2) an impasse during which the traditional theories no longer proved to provide a sufficient framework for understanding the relations (pluralism and particularism are important polarities to be kept in balance, although the balancing act can end in a deadlock) and (3) a third phase which introduces a discussion of New Ventures on interreligious relations. The theories of scholars such as Paul Hedges, Jenny Daggers and David Cheetham are discussed as new ways forward out of the impasse. An overview of past theories is presented, as well as the most recent theories on interreligious relations."

30. Bianchi, Ugo. 1972. "The Definition of Religion (On the Methodology of Historical-Comparative Research)." In *Problems and Methods of the History of Religions* , edited by Bianchi, Ugo, Bleeker, C. J. and Bausani, Alessandro, 15–34. Leiden: Brill.
Discussion pp. 26-34.
"At this point it is clear that the problem of a definition of religion is not the problem of an a priori selection of the facts to which research should be extended, and of which others should be left aside instead (or only considered as a frame, context, or outline). Better to say, it is not a matter of a merely horizontal problem, but of one of penetration; what matters is to understand the real connection between the problem of definition and the problem of a method of research; to understand how to build a definition and, in the same time, how to acquire an adequate knowledge of the object.
Thus, this relation between the definition or concrete, progressive (in the real meaning of the word) research of the definition, and the progress (or, the "methodos", which means etymologically the same) of the research, is essential.
And this suggests the question of what this method must be: should it be a "phenomenological" method, or rather a typological or morphological one, or should it be a historical method, or some combination of both.
It is probable that the method should not be restricted to a typology, morphology or phenomenology that presuppose a concept of religion as something already defined; and this for the reasons already mentioned above. In case, it should touch a typological method able to individualize various types of religion and which could describe, and catalogue, their affinities or differences, to reach a view of those partly ape and partly different, that is, of those "analogous" things, that are "religions".
But in this case, not only do we obtain for result a series of motionless pictures, in a certain way void of life and concrete motivation, but we also have to face quite some difficulties to intend the connections, the relations of contiguity, the very reasons themselves and the meaning of connection between the ones and the others.
And before anything else one should question the legitimity of the choice of "that" particular unitarian point of view, of "that" distinctive of "religion" (for ex. the "sacred", or the belief in superhuman beings, or similar) that has allowed to catalogue together or to list these phenomena instead of others; now, this would bring back to the impasse of a definition that would at the same time be existent and yet to be done. If instead we should keep to the dialectic of the cognitive process destined to form a concrete, inductive definition of the religious facts,—to the process, the "method", capable of knowing these very facts,—we must also make sure that these dialectic does not center only on the affinities purely resulting from a decomposing and recomposing operation of elements of belief and practice. I.e., we

must cure that the acquisition, through experience, of phenomena that were foreign to the basic culture of the scholar, be, at the same time, the extention of the historiographic experience of the same scholar. And this, to say the truth, is no easy job, due also to the documentation on hand; nor, for the same reasons, are the typological inquiries we were talking of above, deprived of any kind of merit."

31. Bilaniuk, Pedro B. T. 1994. "The Notion of Religion of the Pre-Christian and Christian Eastern Slavs. VI to XII Centuries " In *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990* , edited by Bianchi, Ugo, 375–382. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
"The religiosity of Eastern Slavs was not modelled on a *phobos-type* of religion; there was no fear of the deity or of nature-forces. There was only reverential awe before deity and before mysterious created reality. It was, at least partially, an *eros-type* of religion, or one based on love, fertility, and posterity. As we shall see, at the centre there was the archetype of "mother," the Great Goddess, and the fertile soil. Eastern Slavic *eros-type* religion is very closely connected with the *agape-type* . This is based on mutual and social love, and ultimately reveals itself as a gens-religion, one based on a solidarity of the members of the clan; it involves also a very strong tie with the deceased members of the clan, or the veneration of ancestors. *Nornos-types* of religion, that is ones based on law, have been relatively little developed among the Eastern Slavs. Law has not played an important part in their culture; they have had few canonists or legal minds. One consequence of the lack of *nomos-type* religion is a kind of idealistic wishful thinking. Consequently, Slavic religiosity is not attached to any strict orthodox form of dogmatic formulae. It displays a high degree of individualism and detachment from any legalistic or canonical decisions.
Therefore, at times, one might observe in some individuals eccentric, or even anarchistic formulations or practices." (p. 376, notes omitted)

32. Biller, Peter. 1985. "Words and the Medieval Notion of "Religion"." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* no. 36:351–369.
[This essay is about John Bossy, *Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim* , (1982)].
"However, the statements Bossy makes about medieval *religio* have nothing to do with sociology or Durkheim, and they compel attention because they are historical statements coming from a practising early modern historian whose work elsewhere has shown remarkable understanding of medieval Christianity.
The first part of what follows is an exposition of what Bossy says and what appear to be the implications.
There is, first, an account of the development of the meaning or meanings of the word *religio* . For the sake of clarity it seems convenient to follow Bossy's schematic layout. *Religio* (I): in the classical and patristic period it meant worship, worshipful attitude. *Religio* (IIa): in the early modern period it came to mean a religion or religions (Christian religion, Jewish religion, and so on), a system or systems. (Bossy's account of developments after the early modern period is not pursued here.) Central is a contrast between *religio* (I) where, like other key words, it is an attribute or relation and *religio* (HIIa), where it is a thing in itself, a system or systems.(3)
These are two poles in Bossy's scheme. What intervenes between I and IIa, senses of *religio* in the medieval period, is despatched briefly. *Religio's* classical and, slightly developed, patristic sense (worship, worshipful attitude) disappeared in medieval Christianity. With very few exceptions its reference was to monastic and other religious orders, their way of life, and their professed members. Revival of the earlier sense only came with Valla in the fifteenth century, and with later humanists. Thus there was a long hiatus between meanings I and IIa.(4)
Bossy puts forward a suggestion to explain the emergence in the early modern period of sense IIa, 'a system of faith and worship', one of a variety of 'religions'. What brought about change was the existence in the sixteenth century of a plurality

of embattled and embodied faiths, with the impetus thereby given to see one's own way of belief and worship from the outside. The development in meaning of one word, *religio* , was a verbal reflection of this development in ways of seeing and thinking.(5)" (pp. 351-352)
(...)
"Is Bossy's account of the meanings of the word *religio* in the Middle Ages correct? He makes two claims, that the earlier meanings of *religio* (worship, worshipful attitude) died out, to be replaced by the (broadly) monastic sense, and that the extension of it to a 'system of faith and worship', a thing, waited until the sixteenth century. Are these claims correct?" (p. 355)
(...)
"In this area, words and the medieval notion of 'religion', one early modern historian may not be completely accurate in all that he says about the Middle Ages. However, what he says and his method, the approach through words, do seem fruitful in sharpening the view of this area and raising questions (not all at present fully answerable) about it." (p. 369)
(3) In his article, Bossy is concerned with a parallelism between the development of the words *religio* and *societas* . The Iatter's development from societas (I) - 'companionship' or 'fellowship' - to societas (IIa) - 'a society' - was also for Bossy a development from a meaning in which *societas* was an 'attribute' to a meaning in which it was an 'entity' or 'thing'. This, and his hint that the development in both words from denoting 'attributes' to denoting 'things' may have been part of a broader change in outlook occurring in the early modern period (ibid., 13), lie beyond the scope of the present discussion.
(4) Ibid, 4.
(5) Ibid, 5.

33. Biondo, Vincent F. 2018. "Faith and History: Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s Theory of Religion for the Twenty-First Century." *Toronto Journal of Theology* no. 34:287–292.
Abstract: "Wilfred Cantwell Smith is perhaps the most important Canadian scholar of Religious Studies. At the seventh Parliament of the World’s Religions in 2018, former students acknowledged his influence. This article emphasizes three contributions that have proven prophetic following increased rates of migration and technological development: (1) Smith’s definition of religion as faith and history, or personal piety and cumulative tradition; (2) the interconnectedness of religions; and (3) science or secularism as a religious world view."

34. Blasi, Anthony J. 1998. "Definition of Religion." In *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* , edited by Swatos Jr., Willam H., 129–133. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
"Whether and when to define religion also raises “how” questions. Should one set up sharp lines around religion, to ascertain certainly whether a phenomenon is religious? Or should it have ambiguous boundaries, allowing for the unfamiliar and surprising? Should a definition be broad, including all that might be religious, or narrow so that religion serves as a variable? Should one have a preliminary definition that is fuzzy- edged and broad, and a later one that is sharply cut and narrow? Or does scientific progress begin with narrowly defined, clear cases and proceed to broad, diffuse categories? Should a definition be based primarily on the conceptions held by religious participants, or should it be based on concepts in detached minds?
The definitional literature can be organized around four approaches: substantive, functional, verstehende, and formal." (pp. 129-130)

35. Bossy, John. 1982. "Some Elementary Forms of Durkheim." *Past & Present* no. 95:3–18.
"*Religio* (3) in classical Latin is a sense of duty or reverence for sacred things; derivatively, some object which inspires this frame of mind; thence a cult, or worship in general. Essentially, it is a feeling, a frame of mind; thought good by

Cicero, who contrasted it with superstition, and bad by Lucretius, who contrasted it with nature-piety. In early Christianity it meant worship, a worshipful attitude; it could be true, that is correct, or false, as in Augustine, *De vera religione* (*On True Worship*). In medieval Christianity this usage disappeared. With very few exceptions, the word was only used to describe different sorts of monastic or similar rule, and the way of life pursued under them: the "religious" were, as in subsequent Catholic usage, those who pursued such a life. The word, and its earlier meaning, were revived by fifteenth-century humanists from Lorenzo Valla to Erasmus, partly as a piece of characteristic linguistic antiquarianism, partly as a means of undermining the foundations of the "religious" life in the previous sense, or of traditional Christianity in general. Machiavelli used it, with one or two satirical exceptions, in the classical sense of scrupulosity plus cult, and where he needed something more concrete wrote "sect"; humanists who thought more of Christianity and less of ritual than he did used it to mean a truly reverent, worshipful or pious attitude to God.(4) It was usually used with *vera* or *Christiana* ."
(3) For the history of the word and its derivatives, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York, 1964), pp. 19 ff.; more fully in Michel Despland, *La religion en Occident* (Montreal and Paris, I979); cf. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1973 edn.), p. 88.
(4) Despland, *Religion en Occident,* pp. 132 ff., 185-9; *The Discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli* , trans. Leslie J. Walker, 2 vols. (London, 1975 edn.), i, pp. 240 ff., 363-4, 373, 459.

36. Braun, Willi. 2000. "Religion." In *Guide to the Study of Religion* , edited by Braun, Willi and McCutcheon, Russell T., 3–18. New York: Cassell.
"*Defining the "religion" concept* . But what kind of marker is ‘‘religion’’? What conspicuous things does it pick out and bring into relations for our inspection? Here is a proposal that expresses the orientation of this volume.
Tinkering just a bit with Bruce Lincoln’s definitional thesis (Lincoln 1996b: 225), let us think of “religion” (a) as ordinary and mundane (i.e., in this world) discourses or *arts de faire* (“practices of everyday life” [Certeau 1984]) that are characterized (b) by an orientation to speak of matters transcendent (i.e., beyond the limited spaces of this world) and eternal (i.e., beyond the limits of time) and (c) by a desire to speak of these matters ‘with an authority equally transcendent and eternal’ (Lincoln 1996b: 225). Or, very plainly, “religion” is a kind of human talk that can be differentiated from other human talk by its topical content and its rhetorical propensity (see Spiro, 1966: 93).
References
Certeau, Michel de 1984 *The Practice of the Everyday Life,* Steven Redall (trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
Lincoln, Bruce. 1996b “Theses on Method.” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8: 225-277; reprinted in Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider / Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* . Cassell: 1999.
Spiro, Melford E. 1966 ‘Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation,’ pp. 85-126 in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* . A.S.A. Monographs, vol. 3. London: Tavistock.

37. ———. 2025. "Response: Religion as a Category of Study." In *Religious Inventions: Ancient Mediterranean Practice and the Study of Religion* , edited by Arnal, William and Vearncombe, Erin K., 88–97. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
"Modern religion is a precipitate of the secularization of higher learning, which took place in the early modern period. Religion, it is claimed, cannot be used without qualification as the sum designation for what early Christians believed and practised. Doing so risks inventing unwarranted equivalencies between now and then and, more insidiously, drawing genealogical lines between an imagined original Christianity (*Urchristentum*) and modern Christianities – with many

resulting iniquities (see John Kloppenborg's chapter in this volume). And so biblical scholars are in the main not interested in the study of religion writ large.
All this is true, but it does not mean that religion should not be used as a designation or as a name given to a range of human practices in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, nor does it mean, especially, that biblical studies are not religious studies. Although biblical studies predate, and thus are ancestral to, the general study of religion, this is not an argument for the isolation of biblical studies from religious studies, nor from the humanities and social sciences in the modern university. On the contrary, the synergy between the two fields has been well documented.(4) (p. 88)
(4) For example, Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion and Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009), 5–27.
References
John S. Kloppenborg, *Second-Century Constructions of Christianity* , pp. 36-68.

38. Bremmer, Jan. 1998. "'Religion', 'Ritual' and the Opposition 'Sacred vs. Profane'. Notes towards a Terminological 'Genealogy'." In *Ansichten Griechischer Rituale. Geburtstags-symposium für Walter Burkert, Castelen Bei Basel, 15. - 18. märz 1996* , edited by Graf, Fritz, 9–32. Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner.
"In the time of Cicero, Lucretius and Vergil(7), *religio* was not equivalent to our notion of 'religion' but contained a strong ritualistic aspect and was often connected with active worship according to the rules. This meaning was still prevalent in early Christian Latin. It was Lactantius (*Inst. Div.* 4.28), who first started to stress the tie between God and man as expressed in *religio* and therefore preferred an etymological connection with religare(8). In Augustine the idea of worship remained as strong as ever, but the opposition between Christians and pagans now allowed him to speak of a *religio Christiana* and of the contrast between a *vera* and a *falsa religio* . It is from this stage of the word that we can understand its medieval development(9)." (p. 10)
(7) 7 J. Salem, "Comment traduire *religio* chez Lucrèce? Notes sur la constitution d'un vocabulaire philosophique latin ä l'époque de Cicéron et Lucrece", *Et. Class* . 62 (1994) 3 - 26.
(8) Feil 1986, 60-64; C. A. Spada, "L'uso di *religio* e *religiones* nella polemica antipagana di Lattanzio", in: Bianchi 1994, 459-463.
(9) For the early Church see L. Koep, "'Religio' und 'Ritus' als Problem des frühen Christentums", JbAC [Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum] 5 (1962) 43-59; P. Stockmeier, Glaube und Religion in der frühen Kirche (Freiburg i. Br. usw. 1972); Feil 1986, 50-82; M. Sachot, "Comment le christianisme est-il devenu *religio* ?", *Rev. des Sciences Religieuses* 59 (1985) 95-118; id., "*Religio/Superstitio* . Histoire d'une subversion et d'un retournement", *Rev.Hist. Rel* . 208 (1991) 355-394.
(...)
"Important changes took place during and shortly after the Reformation, when the simple plurality of faiths greatly stimulated reflection on the phenomenon of religion. In the sixteenth century *religio Christiana* still means 'Christian religion', that is, the correct mode of Christian piety. But the ongoing religious wars and polemics gradually led to an objectification: *religio* started to assume the meaning of a set of doctrines, which could be true or false. From there, the development led in the first half of the seventeenth century to 'the Christian religion' and, subsequently, to 'Religion', perhaps first in Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583—1648). This development has recently been traced in various details and its major lines are now clear(12)." (p. 11)
(12) Despland 1979, 167-325 (16th and 17th century); J. Bossey, "Some Elementary Forms of Dürkheim", *Past & Present* 95 (1982) 3-18, esp. 4-8 ; J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion. Criticism from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven/London 1987) 23-39: "The Deist Option: Herbert of Cherbury" (on Edward Herbert, 1583-1648); E. Feil, "From the Classical *Religio* to the Modern Religion. Elements of a Transformation between 1550 and 1650", in: M. Despland/G. Vallée (eds.), Religion

in History. *The Word, the Idea, the Reality* (Waterloo, Ont. 1992) 31-43, an otherwise disappointing collection.
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Bianchi, U. (ed.): *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research* . Selected Proc. of the XVIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Rome, 3rd-8th September, 1990, Storia delle religioni 8, Roma 1994.
Despland, M.: *La religion en Occident* , Montreal 1979
Feil, E.: *Religio. Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation* , Forsch, z. Kirchen und Dogmengesch. 36, Göttingen 1986.

39. Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, Drake, Durant, and Haydon, A. Eustace. 1927. "The Definition of Religion: A Symposium." *The Journal of Religion* no. 7:113–135. Edgar Sheffield Brightman, pp. 113-116; Durant Drake, pp. 116-125; A. Eustace Haydon, pp. 125-135.
"Three questions have been proposed by the editor, and I shall take these up in order.
I. *Give your definition of religion* . The assumption that there is a definition of religion which will do for all purposes is, in my opinion, a fallacy which generates pseudo-problems and conceals real problems. At least two different types of definition are to be reckoned with - the descriptive and the normative. When the difference between these two types is overlooked, various sorts of confusion may arise. A descriptive definition may be treated as normative, in which case a minimum religion emerges - a pale, ghostly shadow of itself.
Or a normative definition may be treated as descriptive, in which case many genuinely religious phenomena may be denied to be religious. Or it may be held that no descriptive definition is possible, in which case no science of religion is possible. Or it may be held that no normative definition is possible, in which case no practice of religion is rational." (Brightman, p. 113)

40. Broucek, James. 2015. "Thinking About Religion Before ‘Religion’: A Review of Brent Nongbri’s *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* ." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* no. 98:98–125.
Abstract: "Proponents of the view that religion is a socially constructed concept frequently argue that historians should not write about religion in the premodern world. Brent Nongbri’s *Before Religion* nuances this argument by distinguishing between issues of translation and issues of historiography. Like other social constructionists, Nongbri argues that historians cannot defensibly translate words from premodern source languages as ‘religion’. He maintains, however, that historians can defensibly write about premodern religions, so long as they write redescriptive histories: narratives that explicitly treat ‘religion’ as a modern, anachronistic category that the historian applies to premodern materials for explanatory purposes. This review challenges both parts of Nongbri’s argument. Historians are entitled to translate premodern terms as ‘religion’, and social constructionists of religion are better off abandoning Nongbri’s distinction between descriptive and redescriptive histories. All histories are redescriptive, in Nongbri’s sense, making histories of premodern religions less exotic and less problematic than many imagine."

41. Bruce, Steve. 2011. "Defining religion: a practical response." *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie* no. 21:107–120.
Abstract: "After addressing the post-modern argument that defining religion is impossible, bad or both, the case is made that functional definitions of religion are generally not definitions but assertions about the consequences of religion substantively defined. A substantive definition of religion is proposed. The relationship between ordinary and sociological language is discussed. A review of recent debates in the sociology of religion makes the point that our arguments rarely concern the definition of religion; they are much more often about the practical

identification and measurement of the features of the social phenomenon which we want to study and those problems are not peculiar to the sociology of religion."

42. Buchholz, Peter. 1994. "Aspects of Recent Research in Pagan Germanic and Scandinavian Religion." In *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (I.A.H.R.), Rome, 3rd–8th September, 1990* , edited by Bianchi, Ugo, 383–394. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
"This short stuvey is intended as an orientation in a very complex and controversial field where serious research has been going on since Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835).
My survey deals with pre-Christian religion or religions in Scandinavia (including North Germany, especially Schleswig-Holstein) from the Iron Age (ca 500 B.C.) up to medieval times. The Old Icelandic/Old Norse texts were written/recorded from the 12th century to the 15th. I spoke of religions because there was probably no single uniform pagan Scandinavian religion in the sense "religion" has acquired in Christianity or Islam.
The decision to exclude the Bronze Age is based on the most probable dating of linguistic phenomena that are thought to be characteristic for the Germanic languages.
There is evidence for religious similarities in the areas where Germanic dialects were probably spoken. Such phenomena include the names of some gods, e.g. those contained in the designations for the days of the week. There may, however, also have been *some* religious continuity from Late Bronze to Early Iron Age(1)." (p. 383)
(1) Cf. e.g. Hilda R.E. Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology* , rev. ed. Feltham: Newnes 1982; Jan de Vries, Allgermanische Religionsgeschichte I-II. Berlin: W. de Gruyter 21956-57 [1970); Edgar C. Polome, Germanic Religion and the Indo-European Heritage. Mankind Quarterly 26, 1985, 19-55; id. Geemanic Religion., in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* , New York 1987, Vol. 5, 521-536; Marianne Gorman, *Nordiskt och keltiskt. Sydskandinavisk religion onder yngre bronsalder och keltisk järnälder* , Diss. Lund 1987.

43. Byrne, Peter. 1988. "The Theory of Religion and Method in the Study of Religion in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* ." *Religious Studies* no. 24:3–10.
"In this review of articles in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* I have selected those concerning theoretical issues about the nature of religion and those describing the history and methods of the study of religion as an academic discipline. By any count this collection of papers (over 50) should be of central importance to an encyclopaedia of this nature." (p. 3)
(...)
"The article ' Religion' in vol. XII unfortunately belongs among the weaker entries on the theory of religion.
The necessity of a clear-sighted characterization of religion for the purposes of the Encyclopedia is unfortunately highlighted by the one strong point in the ' Religion' entry, namely its account of the extent to which the concept of religion was tied in its history to a context of Western ideas and particularly to the notion that religion was service and worship of a transcendent God." (p. 5)
(...)
""As a survey of the concept of religion and the literature about it, this entry is not to be compared with the article of 20 years ago by William Alston in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed P. Edwards). Given that the debate has gone forward since Alston's piece, with significant publications to summarize and comment on, it is a pity that the editors could not maintain the standard of entry of the earlier publication." (p. 6)

44. ———. 1988. "Religion and the Religions." In *The World's Religions: The Study of Religion, Traditional and New Religions* , edited by Sutherland, Steven and Clarke, Peter, 3–28. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

"The aim of this book is to offer a survey of the world's religions. We must ask ourselves at the outset what is the general character of the thing the more specialised chapters describe. There are three important questions which must be considered prior to any detailed description of the religious life of mankind in history: What is religion? What kind of unity does it possess? How far is it available for disinterested study? Each of the questions will be considered in separate subsections below." (p. 3)

(...)

"Many believe that to be able to identify different religions and baptise them with names such as 'Hinduism' and 'Christianity' presupposes that there is some easily definable common element that distinguishes them from one another. But if we can legitimately distinguish a host of Indian forms of belief and worship by the term 'Hinduism', this is not because there is some essential unity among them that can be seen on the surface. We have, in fact, coined an umbrella term which refers to a mass of phenomena which does not aspire to be a unity and which is not united by any single item of belief, mode of worship etc. (see Smith, 1978:65–6). The use of the single term to cover all these phenomena rests only on there being a significant family likeness between them of the sort Wittgenstein has described for us. Nor is this lack of unity simply a feature of the religious traditions of India. In Christianity there is evidently a greater desire to present the religion as a unity and its various sects will accordingly tend to present themselves as representatives of '*the* Church of Christ'. But even in this instance, the actual forms of religion to which we give the label 'Christianity' have shown, and continue to show, the most astonishing variety.

(...)

The reason for the variability within specific religions is the same as that for the variability of the general phenomenon, 'religion'. To speak of 'Hinduism' or 'Christianity' is to refer to aspects of the belief, practice, organisation and experience of human beings. These aspects of human life show the variability that human beings show. We might wish as students of human life that human beings believed and behaved more uniformly but they do not. There is limitless scope for novelty and for receptivity to the differing influences of time and place amongst human beings. It is the humanity of religion and the religions which commands that we begin our study with an open-ended definition of 'religion'." (pp. 11-12)

References

Smith, W.C. *The Meaning and End of Religion* (SPCK, London, 1978)

45. ———. 1989. *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* . New York: Routledge.

"The concept of natural religion is not a unitary notion. Of the many senses of the phrase 'natural religion' to be found in philosophical thought four will occupy our attention as we trace the emergence of the concept of religion. Three can be brought out by considering the oppositions or distinctions in which 'natural religion' or the allied 'natural theology' can figure. These oppositions are: (1) natural religion (theology) versus revealed religion (theology); (2) natural theology versus civil and mythic theology; (3) natural religion versus supernatural religion. The fourth sense of 'natural religion' to be treated does not fit so easily into a pair of opposites, being used to refer to a natural human religiousness. All these modes of natural religion (theology) will be explored in sections of this chapter. In this section the first sense and contrast wi)) be discussed." (p. 1)

(...)

"During the course of this study we have located the legacy of deism primarily in its contribution to the development of the concept of religion, and through that to the development of the study of religion. We have argued that it stands at the head of a movement of thought which is a vital influence on the emergence of the historical and global study of religions. Its chief contribution to that movement. is its assertion and defence (by way of its promotion of the concept of natural religion) of the historical, natural, and universal character of religion. The previous chapter

illustrates how this assertion and defence were important in the writings of the nineteenth-century pioneers of the history and anthropology of religion. We must now offer some comment on the question of how far this legacy of deism still plays a role in the contemporary study of religion." (p. 207)

46. ———. 1999. "The definition of religion: squaring the circle." In *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests* , edited by Platvoet, Jan G. and Molendijk, Arie L., 379–396. Leiden: Brill.
"In brief: a religion is any set of symbols (and associated actions, attitudes, feelings and experiences) providing human beings with a solution to evil by way of a theodicy. We can give sense to 'religion in general' by these means as well. Religion is that propensity in human beings (however grounded) to respond to evil by seeking the kind of meaning (to engage in the kind of actions, exhibit the kind of attitudes ...) associated with the enterprise of theodicy.
I now wish to explore all the many advantages of this definition of 'religion'. One of the most significant features of the moral definition of 'religion' is that it enables us to appreciate and ultimately reconcile both substantive and functionalist definitions of 'religion'. It is natural that many things we call 'religions' have symbols referring to a realm of reality and order behind the given world inhabited by superhuman entities of some kind. One natural way of giving shape to the thought that there is a moral order behind the natural order we inhabit is through the picture of gods or a god whose values reflect our own and who, guided by those values, ultimately control our destinies. Achieving the good by way of relationship in thought, feeling and deed with the most real is comprehensibly represented by the picture of communion with the gods or God. Sacraments, sacrifices and the like are the means by which human beings can be related to the ultimate order of existence." (pp. 385-386)

47. Campany, Robert Ford. 2003. "On the Very Idea of Religions (In the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)." *History of Religions* no. 42:287–319.
"In sum, my argument is not that we should cease speaking of religions in cultures that lack an analogous vocabulary because they lack that vocabulary; for, as I have shown, matters are not that simple, and even a culture as different from the modern West as that of early medieval China, with its situation of new religious imports and plurality, generated analogous usages. But, if we are to go on speaking of religions, we should at least find new metaphors for doing so. If possible, the new metaphors should avoid picturing religions as really existent things in the world; as organisms; as hard-sided, clearly demarcated containers of people and things; and as agents, because picturing them in all these ways falsifies the actual state of things and skews our research questions in unfortunate ways. Religions do not exist, at least not in the same way that people and their textual and visual artifacts and performances do.
And when religions are metaphorically imagined as doing things, it becomes harder to see the agents who really and nonmetaphorically do things: people." (p. 319)

48. ———. 2018. "“Religious” as a Category: A Comparative Case Study." *Numen* no. 65:333–376.
Abstract: "Rightly noting that premodern non-Western cultures lacked a version of the modern Western category of “the religious,” some scholars have proposed simply abandoning it. Meanwhile, other scholars continue to wield it uncritically. In this article I propose a middle way, using premodern China as an example. Although China had no category exactly matching “the religious” in meaning and scope, it did, I argue, have an analogous category, one that functioned somewhat similarly in a partially analogous discourse that, like the Western category, formed part of an imperial project. More generally, I suggest that we do well to inquire into the extent to which the cultures we study possessed analogues to the categories and concepts in terms of which we characterize them, rather than assume either that they did or that they did not."

49. Carus, Paul. 1904. "Definition of religion." *The Monist* no. 14:766–770.

"In brief, religion covers man's relation to the entirety of existence.
The characteristic feature of religion is conviction, and its contents a world conception which serves for the regulation of conduct.
This definition of religion is as broad as it sweeping; it covers not only the theistic faith, but also the atheistic religions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, and also all philosophies, for religion is the philosophy of historical movements, while a philosophy is the religion of an individual thinker. Our definition includes all serious convictions, even those which pride themselves on being irreligious.
Irreligion, according to our definition would alone that man be who had no rule of conduct, no maxim according to which he could regulate his life, and thus the irreligious man would practically be identical with the thoughtless man, the man without convictions, without principles, who lives only for the present moment, who never thinks of the future or the past and who, animal-like, only satisfies the immediate impulses of his instincts.
By offering this comparatively simple definition of religion we do not mean to describe all the awe and reverence which the religious man cherishes for his God, for the authority of his conduct, for his ideals. That is indescribable, as much so as any reality in its peculiar idiosyncracy defies definition, but our definition, it is to be hoped, will prove sufficient for scientific purposes, as a satisfactory generalisation of all religious phenomena." (p. 770)

50. Casadio, Giovanni. 2010. "*Religio* versus Religion." In *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer* , edited by Dijkstra, Jitse, Kroesen, Justin and Kuiper, Yrne, 301–326. Leiden: Brill.
"The idea that religion is a social construction can be false or true (and it is probably true), but it implies an assertive denial of any transcendence, which is per se a renouncement to scholarly neutrality, in other words, to the stance of 'methodological agnosticism' in favour of a 'methodological atheism', a position involving, in my view, a kind of reversed fideism.(3) But it is the second part of the assertion (the category of religion being born only after the rise of Christianity and being modelled after it) that, to my mind, is philologically-historically untenable and represents a definitely 'false idea about religion'."
(..-)
"There is, apparently, a consensus among the great majority of specialists including the highest authorities that religion as a category is a Christian, Western and recent (eighteenth-century) formation. It would be interesting to study how this *communis opinio* was formed, on the basis of which philosophical, sociological, political and psychological motivations it became a compulsory *topos* . However it is our firm conviction, formed in years of philological-historical investigation,(10) that the categorization of religion is not only Christian, not only Western (with all the ambiguity and contradiction included in this stereotypical term) and not at all recent. In this paper the focus is on the Roman world and the Latin language (a similar research on the Greek world and the corresponding terminology is among our projects)." (pp. 303-304, a note omitted)
(3) The social constructionist form of 'bracketing' that Peter Berger labelled 'methodological atheism' has long been a presupposition taken for granted in the sociological study of religion. But, consistently applied, methodological atheism ultimately dissolves the very category of experience, and camouflages a confessional attitude (from my point of view, self-confident atheism is a quasi religion). More truly neutral than methodological atheism, and actually more in line with what Berger seeks to protect, is a form of bracketing that might be labelled methodological agnosticism (a method that tends to be employed by the psychology of religion and, in the field of the history of religions, has been adopted by Ninian Smart and Peter Antes).(...)
(10) For some anticipations see G. Casadio, "How to Write a Survey of Greek Religion from the Point of view of the Comparative Study of Religion. Three Cases at Issue: Angelo Brelich (1975 / 1985); Jean Pierre Vernant (1987 / 1990); Jan Bremmer (1994 / 2001)", in *Theoretical Frameworks for the Study of Graeco-*

Roman Religions (eds. L.H. Martin and P. Pachis; Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2003), 53-66 (61); idem, “Studying Religious Traditions between the Orient and the Occident: Modernism vs. Post-modernism”, in *Unterwegs. Neue Pfade in der Religionswissenschaft. Festschrift für Michael Pye zum* 65. *Geburtstag* (Munich: Biblion, 2004) 119-135 (135).

51. ———. 2016. "Historicizing and translating religion." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion* , edited by Stausberg, Michael and Engler, Steven, 33–51. New York: Oxford University Press.
Chapter summary: "The aim of this chapter is to justify the general application of the taxon ‘religion’ as a unitary analytical concept situated in history, and to locate religions as interculturally translatable and communicable systems of beliefs and practices related to superhuman agents.
• A series of case studies disprove the common idea that religion was an exclusive invention of modern European scholarship.
• Both ordinary people and scholars across diverse world traditions and various historical epochs not only conceptualized their religion as a specific realm but also talked about religions as a cross-cultural taxonomic category."

52. Casey, Patrick J. 2021. "Religion, Definition of." In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion: Volume 4* , edited by Goetz, Stewart and Taliaferro, Charles. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
"The use of the word “religion” to denote a discrete body of beliefs and practices is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the seventeenth century, cognates of “religion” were used infrequently and often meant something more like “inner piety” or “worship” (see Harrison 2015; Smith [1962] 1991). Beginning in the early modern period and continuing throught the enlightenment, there was a shift in linguistic use away from using “religion” to denote inner piety to denoting a body of beliefs which could be true or false in a propositional sense. During this period there was sustained engagement between members of divergent faiths and cultures – e.g. various forms of Christianity with one another, and European cultures with non-European cultures through colonization. As a result, there was a new concern to make various kinds of distinctions between faiths. Under the epistemological influence of the Enlightenment, this took the form of conceptualizing one’s own faith as a body of beliefs set against other sets of beliefs. Indeed, many of the labels assigned to non-Western increased awareness of religions led to inquiries into what they might have in common – thus a general notion of “religion” emerged, frequently articulated in terms of the recently constructed notion of “natural religion” which was purported to be universal or innate, grounded in reason rather than the revelation of “positive” faiths (Christianity, Islam, etc.). Religion began to be thought of as a homogenous, unitary, and generic thing (a process often called “reification”) of which we can ask questions like, “What is the essence of religion?”."