

Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices* (New York: New York University Press). Pp. 255. £23.00. ISBN: 1479804347

Nancy Tatom Ammerman's *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices* offers its readers insights into the social scientific study of lived religion. Ammerman situates her work against the secularisation thesis by arguing that religiosity is not merely about beliefs and memberships in religious organisations. Instead, she argues that scholars ought to engage with everyday religion, which is dynamic and can be found in, but not limited to, formal religious gatherings, yoga studios, NGO work, individual worship, nationalism, and extremism. Through thoughtful and in-depth analysis of anthropological, psychological, sociological, and religious studies theories and empirical studies of lived religion and social life, she skilfully demonstrates her sensitive approach to researching lived religion and everyday religion as a response to the secularisation thesis.

In Part 1, Chapters 1 (Studying What People Do) and 2 (Lived Religion and Its Contexts), Ammerman places lived religion in the broader context of social life. Ammerman explains the significance of practices, which, to her, are 'a cluster of actions that is socially recognizable in ways that allow others to know how to respond' (p. 15). She notes that scholars must be attentive to a variety of ways people engage with religious practices in order to contextualise and theorise lived religion. Drawing on Bourdieu's notions of fields of interactions and habitus, she notes that religious fields do not exist in isolation; rather, they interact with other fields such as family. Lived religion is, moreover, evolving. Ammerman argues people bring autonomy and creativity to their practices, some challenge expectations and norms, and some override traditions. As such, Ammerman contests that there are six key elements to studying lived religion: embodiment, emotion, materiality, moral judgement, aesthetics, and narrative. Additionally, she explains the importance of cultural contexts since religion is a socially defined category. As such, she guides the reader through entangled, established, institutional, interstitial, and postcolonial contexts, while being attentive to the fact that these categories are not mutually exclusive.

In Part 2, Ammerman sensitively and appropriately guides the readers through key dimensions of studying lived religion. In chapter 3 (The Spiritual Dimensions of Lived Religion),

she questions what spirituality is from a social scientific perspective. In doing so, she notes that it is more appropriate to apply a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach to the study of religious practices. She specifically looks at how spirituality works and the work that it does by drawing on numerous cultural contexts from around the world, including grihapravesham in India, hymn singing in Protestant churches in the US, mourning rituals in England following the death of Princess Diana, and Aboriginal nature spirituality. She also notes that, because some minorities, such as women and LGBTQ+ people, have been denied access from some religious places, they might turn to paganism and New Age movements. Chapter 4 (Embodied Religious Practice) argues that bodies are social and the mind and spirit, therefore, cannot be separated from the body. The chapter looks at what embodied practices do, various embodied performances, and the challenges of studying embodied religious practices. Specifically, it draws on examples of food practices (such as kosher and halal), dress code and jewellery (such as necklaces with a cross), and tattoos. It also looks at physical spaces, such as gender division in Orthodox synagogues.

Ammerman continues to guide the reader through the dimensions of lived religion in the following chapters. In Chapter 5 (The Materiality of Lived Religion), Ammerman argues that religious material objects are central to our identification of religion. Focusing on how materiality is social, the importance of materiality, and material boundaries, Ammerman explains multiple ways religion is social. From the importance of photos, images, and icons in Christianity, to Palestinian families living in the diaspora who remember Palestine through artefacts, and to the spirituality of knitting, just to mention a few examples, she demonstrates that materiality is central to people's sense of belonging, remembering one's history and heritage, empowerment, and boundaries of good/bad and inclusion/exclusion. Chapter 6 (Lived Religious Emotions) deals with emotions. It takes a more psycho-social approach and evaluates why emotions are important by being conscious of the barriers to studying emotion. For example, it might be more accessible to observe activities and behaviours but harder to study people's emotional experiences. Here, Ammerman uses examples of interfaith work, participating and connecting with some rituals and prayers as opposed to others, and remembrance. She also notes emotions are vital in terms of belonging.

Chapter 7 (Lived Religious Aesthetics) looks at everyday dimensions of social religious practices, by especially paying attention to the senses as a way to distinguish the sacred from the profane as well as high and low culture. The chapter looks at intersections between art and religion and how religious festivals are feasts for the senses. Here, Ammerman draws on examples of, for example, Catholic Church décor and constructions pre and post the Second Vatican Council and Black Gospel music to provide a vast overview of how aesthetics are culturally rooted and historically timely. In Chapter 8 (Morality in Religious Practices), Ammerman argues morality is deeply intertwined with identity and, therefore, religious behaviour. She claims morality serves to pass principles on to followers, such as Confucianism, claim right and appropriate behaviours such as how water is used to purify across religions, to resistant and support status quos in social movements, and to include or exclude people. Chapter 9 (Narratives in Religious Practice), the penultima chapter, draws attention to the importance of told stories and the way these stories are told. In this era, Ammerman notes that we cannot only look at religious scriptures but also ought to look at blogs, vlogs, and tweets. She also draws attention to how narratives can make people connect to religion by looking at Birthright trips to Israel for Jews in the diaspora. Here she again underlines that 'practices are both structured and habitual, that they often reinforce inequality and division but are also open to disruption and improvisation' (p. 178). Finally, the Concluding and Beginning chapter focuses on methodologies that are useful to studying lived religion.

Ammerman's book reads as a refreshing take on studying lived religion. She poses methodological and theoretical questions on what it means to study religion in the 21st century by focusing on a broad variety of practices and cultural contexts. With regards to the philosophy of religion, she firstly questions the secularisation thesis that some scholars follow by drawing attention to everyday religion. Next, throughout the book, Ammerman shows her commitment to studying lived religion as a multidimensional and multicultural phenomenon. In doing so, she demonstrates how various disciplines complement each other, which can make us question previous ways of approaching the study of religion, which is highly relevant to the philosophy of religion. Ammerman, furthermore, integrates the role of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class to note how people's lived experiences are further impacted by their identities. She brings an array of examples from different cultures and traditions to

compare and contrast experiences and demonstrates how performances and behaviours ought to be culturally contextualised.

I was impressed by the breath and width of practices and contexts Ammerman draws on. On the one hand, it demonstrated intersectional aspects and how we ought to rethink both how we study religion methodologically and what constitutes beliefs and practices. The studies Ammerman builds her arguments around are well-integrated either in the text body or in text boxes, which helps the reader understand her arguments. She continually demonstrates the necessity to study lived religion as a complex phenomenon. However, by drawing on so many traditions, I feared some groups were generalised. For example, there were multiple references to religious Jewish women without an appreciation that Orthodox women lead widely different lives depending on their cultural contexts, and that progressive Jews are also religious. Again, this is precisely the purpose of the book – being attentive to lived religion and making us notice how Modern Orthodox women in New York live as opposed to Haredi women in Golders Green, London. In that respect, Ammerman's book can serve as a great introduction to the study of lived religion and readers can then specialise in an area from there.

This book puts forward an important concept, lived religion, and it shows that a lot of interesting things can be done with this term by contextualising contemporary practices across many cultural texts. This book is written for students, evidenced by its frequent use of 'students' when referring to the reader. Students from anthropology, religious studies, sociology, political science, philosophy, and psychology can benefit from reading this book. By writing it for students, the book will certainly inspire and guide many prospective researchers. The language is accessible, and each chapter finishes with suggested further readings, which makes the concept more relevant and will certainly contribute to many conversations on studying religion.

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