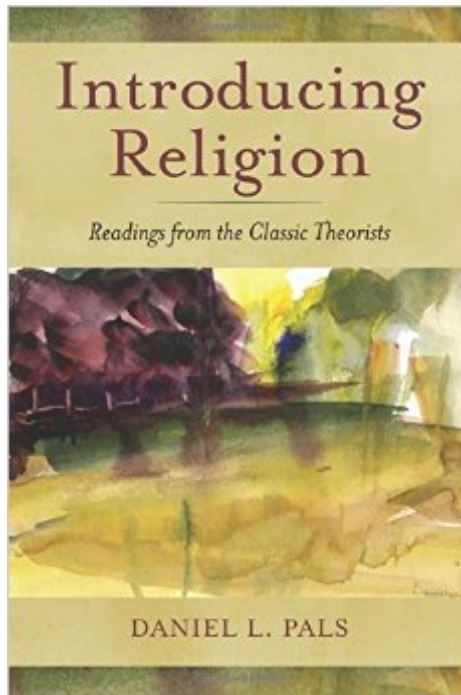


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Introducing Religion: Readings From The Classic Theorists



Synopsis

What is religion? How is it to be explained? Why do human beings believe in divinities? Why do the beliefs and behaviors we typically describe as religious so deeply affect the human personality and so subtly weave their way through human society? *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* presents eleven key texts from influential theorists who played a pivotal role in the modern enterprise of explaining the phenomenon of religion. These writings seek to account for the origin, function, and enduring human appeal of religion by drawing on methods of scientific scholarship unconstrained by theological creeds or confessional commitments. An ideal companion to author Daniel L. Pals' textbook, *Eight Theories of Religion*, Second Edition, or other beginning texts, *Introducing Religion* opens with selections from the works of Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer--Victorian pioneers in anthropology and the comparative study of religion. It then offers entry into the provocative analyses of Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx, whose aggressive reductionist approaches framed the explanatory debate for much of the century to follow. Responses to reductionist theories--and new directions in explanation--claim a place in selections from the works of philosopher-psychologist William James, theologian Rudolf Otto, sociologist Max Weber, and comparativist Mircea Eliade. The volume ends with discussions drawn from the celebrated field studies of British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard and the interpretive anthropology of American theorist Clifford Geertz, whose fieldwork took him to both Asia and the Middle East. Brief career portraits of the theorists at the outset of each chapter give context to the readings, and a general introduction features guiding questions designed to help students assess and compare the different theories. Offering an illuminating overview of this controversial and engaging subject, *Introducing Religion: Readings from the Classic Theorists* is ideal for introductory courses in religion as well as courses in method and theory of religion, world religions, and sociology, psychology, or anthropology of religion.

Book Information

Paperback: 400 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (October 23, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195181492

ISBN-13: 978-0195181494

Product Dimensions: 8.2 x 0.9 x 5.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (7 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #217,161 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #312 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Sociology #415 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Religious #422 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Philosophy

Customer Reviews

A more accurate title would be Quaint and Curious Myths from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries That Once Passed as Serious Discussion of Religion. Tylor, Frazer, and Freud were simply spinners of tales and no one takes them seriously anymore. The religious theories of Durkheim and Marx have been debunked, though they raised important questions about the relationship between religion and society. James and Otto have interesting things to say but in spite of their intentions to be more general they mostly represent forms of Christianity in Europe and America a hundred years ago. Weber, Evans-Pritchard and Geertz still have important things to say. Eliade was a genius who described a mystical theology that largely existed in his own mind. As a history of the academic study of religion in Europe and America in the last hundred and fifty years, the book is excellent, with good selections from the usual white male suspects that were still in the discussion thirty years ago and a helpful introduction. The title suggests it is an intro textbook or way for a general reader to understand religion. That is not what it is. It would be a good text for a graduate level class entitled Mistakes You Do Not Have To Make Because Others Have Already Made Them. Some suggestions for reading that are more relevant for recent discussions are Okot p'Bitek's African Religion in Western Scholarship, recently reprinted as Decolonizing African Religions, Peter Berger's Sacred Canopy about the sociology of knowledge, and Harvey Whitehouse's Modes of Religiosity about cognitive theory. In spite of its lapses, Vine Deloria, Jr.'s God is Red is a helpful antidote to the domination of religious studies by thinking based one way or another on Christian myths and modes of thought.

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