

Book Reviews

Encyclopedia of Religions and Society

By William H. Swatos, Jr (ed). SAGE and AltaMira Press, 1998, xiv + 590 pp.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* can be regarded as the first substantial reference work specifically concerned with the sociological study of religion. Simply by filling this gap in the existing literature, it is a book that deserves to be widely recognized for making this contribution to the field. Although Islam and consideration of Islam in relation to the social sciences makes only a very limited appearance in the volume, this new work needs to be thoroughly assessed for its value in the social scientific study of Muslim communities and Islamic societies.

One hundred and nine international experts in the sociology of religion have contributed to the volume. Reflecting the development of the discipline, the encyclopedia has an interdisciplinary character, which makes it a useful resource not only for sociologists, but also for scholars from anthropology, psychology, and religious studies. As a reference work in the sociology of religion, it would be hard to identify any gaps in terms of entries, especially as all the standard terms and theories are comprehensively covered. Many concepts more closely associated with mainstream sociology (such as "deviance," "attitude," "research methods") also carry an entry and their particular relationship to the sociology of religion is often drawn out. An especially valuable feature of the work is that there are entries for people and organizations, thereby making it possible to identify key personalities, publications, and professional societies, past and present. Through the encyclopedia it is possible to piece together the academic and institutional development of the discipline. There is a critical aspect to most of the longer entries, and this evaluative dimension makes the book a valuable resource for students. The varying length of entries, from just a few sentences to essay-length, appears to be carefully and appropriately judged. Most entries carry either a short bibliography or references thus assisting researchers to locate key texts. The helpful and extensive cross-referencing provides a further pointer to related concepts and terms, whilst the avoidance of complex technical jargon makes the book accessible to a wide readership, and those new to the field. The encyclopedia's very comprehensive and detailed index will help readers to locate all the occurrences of theories and

topics. This makes the book a valuable user-friendly resource for students, researchers, and teachers and it undoubtedly deserves a place on library shelves.

One of the disadvantages of having specialists in the sociology of religion writing lengthy entries about world religions (for each of the major world faiths and many of the smaller ones) is that important detail is sometimes overlooked, or worse still, mistakes are made. For example, the entry of "Buddhism" makes some irritating factual and spelling errors, while the fascinating essay on the "Ecology of Religion" suffers from inaccurate spelling and transliteration of an Arabic term in relation to Islam. Fortunately, the entry on Islam itself is faultless in terms of accuracy, and is one of the most comprehensive short essays on Islam to be found.

Other entries specifically relating to Islam and Muslims include short essays on the Nation of Islam and Ayatollah Khomeini, while as part of an entry on "Change" the work of the fourteenth century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun is credited with being perhaps the "forerunner of social sciences." Apart from other occasional references to Islam in the modern world, there are no other entries where Islam forms a major aspect of the discussion.

To some extent, the scant appearance of Islam and concepts relating to the social aspects of the Muslim world is a reflection of the way that the sociology of religion has developed, and, more particularly, the time and place in which it became a distinct sub-discipline in sociology. It was European and American scholars at the turn of the century who provided the intellectual leadership which led to the emergence of the sociology of religion – Weber and Durkheim in particular. Later activity in the middle of the century was principally focused around the scholarship of French Catholics under Gabriel Le Bras and the American sociologist Talcott Parsons, and the generation of scholars influenced by him. The result, certainly where this new encyclopedia is concerned, is a striking absence of references to Islam, Islamic terms and concepts and Muslim scholars. The Christian American bias throughout – no doubt a reflection of market forces and the background of many of the contributors – is reflected in the fact that, for example, there is a lengthy entry on "Biblical Studies" but no equivalent entry (or index reference) to "Qur'anic Studies" or of other world scriptures.

Despite the clear paucity of entries directly related to the study of Islam and the Muslim world, the encyclopedia is important to Muslim social scientists for a number of reasons. It provides an extremely valuable "toolkit" of terms, theories and concepts that can be used to analyze Muslim societies. Entries on "globalization," "identity" or "pluralism" are part of the vocabulary of mainstream sociological debate and Muslim scholars have an important contribu-

tion to make to this especially as in many of the national and international professional associations in the sociology of religion, the perspectives of Muslim social scientists are often lacking; the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* inevitably reflects this lack of participation.

The need for Muslim social scientists to take their place alongside non-Muslim sociologists of religion mirrors another parallel concern within sociology of religion itself. James Beckford, one of the leading sociologists of religion, argues in his book *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* that sociology of religion should end its isolation from neighboring sub-disciplines and indeed from mainstream sociology. Sociological perspectives on religious phenomena have a contribution to make to the understanding of society as a whole and, likewise, sociology of religion should not isolate itself from mainstream social theory. In much the same way, Islamic social scientists should be contributing to sociological debates both inside and outside Muslim circles. The new *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* will provide to those willing to take up this challenge a valuable toolkit for conceptual and analytical engagement.

Sophie Gilliat-Ray
Department of Sociology
University of Exeter
UK

Encyclopedia of Religion and Society

Edited by Robert A. Segal and Robert A. Segal. (New York: Routledge, 2012.) Pp. 600.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* is a comprehensive and up-to-date reference work that covers the intersection of religion and society. It is edited by Robert A. Segal and Robert A. Segal. The encyclopedia is organized into two volumes, each containing 300 entries. The entries are written by leading scholars in the field of religion and society. The encyclopedia covers a wide range of topics, including the history of religion, the sociology of religion, and the relationship between religion and society. The encyclopedia is a valuable resource for students, scholars, and anyone interested in the study of religion and society.

The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* is a comprehensive and up-to-date reference work that covers the intersection of religion and society. It is edited by Robert A. Segal and Robert A. Segal. The encyclopedia is organized into two volumes, each containing 300 entries. The entries are written by leading scholars in the field of religion and society. The encyclopedia covers a wide range of topics, including the history of religion, the sociology of religion, and the relationship between religion and society. The encyclopedia is a valuable resource for students, scholars, and anyone interested in the study of religion and society.