

Review of *Studying Lived Religion* by Nancy Ammerman, 2021 and *What Happens When We Practice Religion: Textures of Devotion in Everyday Life* by Robert Wuthnow, 2020

Two recent books, Nancy Tatom Ammerman's *Studying Lived Religion: Contexts and Practices* and Robert Wuthnow's *What Happens When We Practice Religion: Textures of Devotion in Everyday Life* offer their readers insights into the social scientific study of lived religion by engaging in conversations on what constitutes religious practices in the 21st century.

Ammerman's book is situated against the secularisation thesis. She argues that scholars of religion must engage with everyday religion rather than merely analysing attitudes towards belief and membership in formal religious organisations. Everyday religion is dynamic and can be found in various places such as NGO work, private religious worship, formal religious gatherings, extremism, and nationalism. Her book provides an in-depth analysis of sociological, psychological, anthropological, and religious studies empirical research and theories of contemporary expressions of lived religion to offer an alternative to the secularisation thesis.

In Chapters 1 (Studying What People Do) and 2 (Lived Religion and Its Contexts), Ammerman contextualises lived religion in social life. She carefully draws on Bourdieu's work on practices and habitus to explain that fields, such as religious fields, can never be isolated; they always interact with other fields. Therefore, it is important to be attentive to the variety of practices people interact with and note that lived religion is simultaneously structured and ever evolving. This is because religions 'often take on a social reality that goes beyond individual experience and shapes the practices of those who interact within it' (p. 29). To elaborate, some people challenge norms and expectations and some transform traditions. Consequently, Ammerman argues scholars of lived religion must be attentive to six aspects: embodiment, materiality, emotion, aesthetics, moral judgement, and narrative, which can be present in institutional, established, interstitial, entangled, and postcolonial contexts.

From here, Ammerman carefully guides the readers through each of the key dimensions of the study of lived religion. In Chapter 3 (The Spiritual Dimensions of Lived Religion) she engages with a thought-provoking conversation of what spirituality is, the importance of

context, and how it works. She argues that spirituality is best approached from a multidisciplinary, multidimensional, and multicultural standpoint, since it makes it easier to see how spirituality works and the work that spirituality does. Here, she draws on examples of singing hymns in Protestant churches in the US, Aboriginal nature spirituality, and spiritual families in Vodou practice. She also notes the importance of power, and how some minorities have been excluded from formal religious institutions and have turned to spirituality instead. In Chapter 4 (Embodied Religious Practice), Ammerman argues that the mind and spirit cannot be separated from the body. She explains the reader how bodies are social, what embodied practices do, as well as challenges of studying these practices to illustrate the importance of how people enact religiosity. She looks at various rites of passages, food practices (such as halal and kosher), physical appearances (beards, hair, dress codes, and jewellery), and healing/hospitals.

Chapter 5 (The Materiality of Lived Religion) considers the importance of religious objects. Focusing on multiple dimensions of materiality, including spaces of worship (formal buildings, nature, and online), smells, and sounds, she demonstrates how religious materiality is social, what it does, and its boundaries. Ammerman brings attention to, among other things, Christian icons, spiritual ecology, and how artefacts help, for example, Palestinians remember Palestine. Thus, materials can make people feel connected to the sacred, create cultural and historical feelings of belonging, and establish boundaries between insiders/outsideers and good/bad. In essence, this helps define everyday life. Following this, Ammerman brings attention to emotions in Chapter 6 (Lived Religious Emotions). The core argument here is that 'we learn about the world through our feelings and those feelings prompt action' (p. 125). This psycho-social chapter examines the importance of feelings, while acknowledging the difficulties in studying them. For instance, she notes it is easier to observe someone read a prayer than it is to understand their emotional response to it. In this chapter, Ammerman highlights genocide remembrance, interfaith work, and why some people participate and relate to certain religious practices and not others.

Next, in Chapter 7 (Lived Religious Aesthetics), Ammerman explains aesthetics is used to distinguish high from low culture and the sacred from the profane. She focuses on religious festivals and intersections of religion and art. Specifically, she notes festivals make religions

recognisable. She illustrates how aesthetics are simultaneously historically timely and culturally rooted by looking at how the Second Vatican Council influenced Catholic Church décor and constructions. Additionally, she notes the importance of intersectionality by bringing attention to “hijabi fashionists” in the UK. The focus of Chapter 8 (Morality in Religious Practices) is the link between morality, identity, and religious behaviour. She argues that morality is important to embodied practices. For example, most religions have purification rituals to wash away sins, Confucianists explicitly pass on moral rules to their followers, and most prayers have a moral component (i.e., asking for forgiveness or expressing gratitude). Morality is, furthermore, used to support or resist status quo and include or exclude people. In Chapter 9 (Narratives in Religious Practice), Ammerman looks at the importance of both religious stories and how the stories are told. Ammerman argues that we can no longer limit this to religious scriptures, but must also consider blogs, vlogs, and tweets. Narratives, she argues, contribute to a sense of belonging. This is, for example, evident in Birthright trips to Israel for Jews in the diaspora, which can enhance religious, historical, and cultural aspects of Jewishness. Lastly, the Concluding and Beginning chapter provides an overview of methodologies that can benefit scholars of lived religion.

Ammerman’s book challenges what it means to study lived religion in the 21st century. She is in conversation with a wealth of theoretical and methodological paradigms, practices, and contexts, which helps the reader gain a better understanding of everyday religion as a complex phenomenon. The multidisciplinary nature of the book excels in demonstrating how religious fields cannot be isolated, and thereby challenges the mono-disciplinary study of religion. To elaborate, her sensitive attention to intersectionality, such as sexuality and ethnicity, highlights how lived religion is influenced by people’s identities, and her well-integrated examples, either in text boxes or in the text body, from all over the world demonstrates how lived religion is culturally situated. The primary concern I have with the numerous examples is that some groups might be generalised. For example, Orthodox Jewish women lead very different lives. However, the purpose of the book is exactly to be attentive to lived religion, which can make us attentive to how Haredi women in Golders Green, London, live compared to Chabad women in Jerusalem.

Ammerman's careful consideration of lived religion introduces the reader to multiple things that can be done with this concept in contemporary cultural settings. The target readership of this book is religious studies, sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and political science students. The book will certainly inspire many people and contribute to conversations and discussions on studying lived religion.

Wuthnow's book argues that religion is culturally constructed and context specific. He observes that the study of practiced 'religion focuses on what people do and say rather than only on what they think and believe' (p. 1). Focusing on habit, improvisation, and power, he situates his book against the lack of attention to practiced religion in social sciences to advance academic inquiry by arguing that religion cannot be understood merely through analysis of predefined categories of beliefs and affiliations/denominations and that religion is also not too subjective for empirical research.

In Chapter 1 (Theories), Wuthnow provides a detailed overview of relevant academic theories. He starts with Durkheim's work on separating the sacred and profane and how religion reflects social power. Then, he introduces Geertz's Berger and Luckmann, and Bellah's work on everyday life, which made religion more cultural rather than merely institutional by arguing that the sacred was set apart because it is linked to moods, emotions, senses of belonging, motivations, and symbolisations. Finally, he looks at the turn towards practice by discussing the sociology of culture and ethnographic works of Asad, de Certeau, Bourdieu, and Swidler. In Chapter 2 (Situations), he argues that it is crucial to investigate identity and material forms of spaces, i.e., situational, discursive, and sacred spaces. He notes the length of a worship service is relevant to understand in terms of the community interactions. He also applies examples of how the Second Temple adapted to contemporary times, home altars found in some Buddhist, Hindu, and Catholic homes, and prayer closets in early modern Europe. Additionally, he looks at the relationship between people and objects, such as having a mezuzah on a doorpost or holding a cross when praying in relation to power dynamics.

Chapter 3 (Intentions) focuses on different types of intentions in the social world. Wuthnow first considers different types of intentionality in social theory by drawing on the works of Berger and Luckmann, Parsons, Geertz, and C. Wright Mills, to mention a few, in relation to

power. In terms of religion, he links intentionality to companionship, impressing people, and thoughts and expectations about suffering. Indicatively, he argues that the extent to which 'religion is practiced, it is a matter not simply of action but of expressing and interpreting intentions' (p. 104). In Chapter 4 (Feelings), Wuthnow, in conversation with Hochschild and Bellah, argues feelings are fundamental to almost everything we know about religion. This is especially relevant as religion informs well-being, i.e., if religion brings happiness, the extent to which people feel contempt towards people of different religions and/or denominations, how religious authorities influence life-cycle events and how they respond in times of joy and sorrow, as well as people's personal and collective responses to and during rituals.

In Chapter 5 (bodies), the penultima chapter, Wuthnow explains the importance of bodies to the study of practiced religion. He explains that Durkheim, Mauss, Merleau-Ponty, and Schutz all considered various aspects of the body in the context of religion and spirituality. This includes embodied practices, body art, music and dance, and the mind-body split. He guides the reader through examples of body routines such as physical appearances (i.e., dress codes, hair styles, and beards), body rituals (i.e., Pentecostals joining hands during rituals), body disciplines (i.e., abstinence), how bodies symbolise representations (i.e., the blood of Christ and sacrificing animals), and "exceptional" bodies. In the final chapter (Conclusion), he summarises his key arguments by going back to the importance of habit, power, and improvisation. Then, he calls for more empirical research on practiced religion in order to advance this field of research.

Wuthnow's book highlights the turn to the study of practice. He engages with a wealth of social scientific theorists to demonstrate how complex the study of religion is, and the many ways aspects of religion can be approached. I was very impressed by the way he guided readers through these theoretical approaches and arguments. This is a challenging task, yet his explicit focus on power, habit, and improvisation, as well as the chapter structure, keep him focused. My primary concern, and at times moments of confusion, is that the examples were not always about religion – explicitly or implicitly. He discusses detailed studies of political participation, flight attendant feelings, and classroom dynamics, to mention a few. Whilst it may have intended to provide relatable examples to readers who may not be familiar with some religious practices, I had hoped he would have focused more on religious practices

and have explained them more to the readers to make the examples of religious practices more accessible to all readers.

Wuthnow skilfully engages with practices from a theoretical point of view, which introduces the reader to numerous paradigms and ways of thinking that will undoubtedly lead to many discussions on how scholars approach religion. Its target readership is for graduate students and scholars of sociology, anthropology, and social theorists.

Taken together, these books provide a rich portrait of contemporary approaches to the social scientific study of religion. Both books provide insightful perspectives into religious practices across various cultural contexts and the importance of advancing scholarly work in this area. Ammerman's approach to the study of lived religion is very empirical, whereas Wuthnow grounds his work in social theories, which is the key difference. Some of their key arguments overlap, such as the attention to emotions, and some indirectly complement each other, i.e., Ammerman's focus on narratives and Wuthnow's attention to power.

Mie Astrup Jensen

University College London

Mie.jensen.20@ucl.ac.uk