



## **Eight Theories of Religion**

*Daniel L. Pals*

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Why do human beings believe in divinities? Why do some seek eternal life, while others seek escape from recurring lives? Why do the beliefs and behaviors we typically call "religious" so deeply affect the human personality and so subtly weave their way through human society? Revised and updated in this second edition, *Eight Theories of Religion* considers how these fundamental questions have engaged the most important thinkers of the modern era. Accessible, systematic, and succinct, the text examines the classic interpretations of religion advanced by theorists who have left a major imprint on the intellectual culture of the twentieth century. The second edition features a new chapter on Max Weber, a revised introduction, and a revised, expanded conclusion that traces the paths of further inquiry and interpretation traveled by theorists in the most recent decades.

*Eight Theories of Religion*, Second Edition, begins with Edward Burnett Tylor and James Frazer--two Victorian pioneers in anthropology and the comparative study of religion. It then considers the great "reductionist" approaches of Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx, all of whom have exercised wide influence up to the present day. The discussion goes on to examine the leading challenges to reductionism as articulated by sociologist Max Weber (new to this edition) and Romanian-American comparativist Mircea Eliade. Finally, it explores the newer methods and ideas arising from the African field studies of ethnographer E. E. Evans-Pritchard and the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Each chapter offers biographical background, theoretical exposition, conceptual analysis, and critical assessment. This common format allows for close comparison and careful evaluation throughout. Ideal for use as a supplementary text in introductory religion courses or as the central text in sociology of religion and courses centered on the explanation and interpretation of religion, *Eight Theories of Religion*, Second Edition, offers an illuminating treatment of this controversial and fascinating subject.

## **Eight Theories of Religion Details**

Date : Published January 12th 2006 by Oxford University Press, USA

ISBN : 9780195165708

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Format : Paperback 340 pages

Genre : Religion, Nonfiction, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Theology

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# From Reader Review Eight Theories of Religion for online ebook

## Kim Shively says

Useful book for my graduate class on theories and methods in the study of religion. I wish the author had included a couple more theorists.

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## Titus Hjelm says

This is a very accessible introduction to the thought of the eight thinkers presented. Pals manages to balance between the more 'reductionist' approaches and the gobbledygook of Eliade well. He also makes the reading relevant for contemporary readers by discussing the theorists' influence. I hear there's another (Nine Theories) edition out now. Curious what the new addition is.

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## Juan Pablo says

"Cuando emprendas tu viaje hacia Ítaca. debes rogar que el viaje sea largo..."

Este libro es una buena introducción a las teorías contemporáneas sobre la religión. Es decir, le sirve al lector no iniciado para conocer el nombre de muchos autores y libros que no ha leído, a la vez que ofrece un esquema simple para clasificarlos.

El problema del libro es que dicho esquema a momentos cansa por su simpleza. Se vincula cada autor a su teoría, pero al final el nombre de cada uno sólo sirve para evocar un concepto: "reduccionismo sociológico" en el caso de Durkheim, "reduccionismo económico" en el de Marx, "antropología victoriana" si es el caso de Tylor y Frazer (y las muchas ideas negativas que el lector aprende a asociar a ese concepto). En un ando opuesto se coloca a Weber, a Eliade (quizás falseando al mismo weber, transformándolo casi en un idealista).

Mi cita a Kavafis es por el siguiente motivo: es mucho mejor el desarrollo del libro que su conclusión. En el capítulo final, en donde el autor pretende sintetizar los contenidos del libro, simplemente se juega con las imágenes borrosas que nos hemos hecho de los autores. por lo tanto, la conclusión es débil, y cansaba.

En resumen, este es un libro introductorio y elemental, y para esos fines funciona bien.

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## Annie says

Well, I skimmed through some of this. Skipped some parts. But we discussed this a lot in my "Approaches to Religion" class. It could be a little boring at times, but it formed a good basis for an introduction for formal "religious studies" from an academic standpoint.

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## **Ashley says**

Interesting views on why people look for religion, what roles religion plays in the influence and control of society, sort of religion as cause and effect.

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## **Themindbloweress says**

Velmi podrobný a srozumitelný úvod do teorie náboženství, obzvlášť s doslovem Radka Chlupa

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## **BHodges says**

Solid overview, just as the title advertises. Balanced, not overly partisan, straightforward and well-structured.

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## **Maria says**

Rarely have I come across a textbook that was so well-written. It is not the type of book that one just picks up and reads whenever; the material is dense at times and complicated. However, with some devotion to the subject this book is possibly the best of its kind.

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## **Kevin says**

A good generic overview of the basic ways theorists answer the questions "What is religion?" and "How/why did religious belief come about?". The critique section of each chapter was especially helpful in analyzing weaknesses of each theory, as was the conclusion that brought all eight theories together and summarized the book nicely. The book was a bit dry, however.

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## **Sydney says**

its a schoolbook

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## **Joshua Stein says**

This book was recommended to me by one of the men I look up to in religious studies, and it certainly makes sense that he'd recommend it, following the reading. The text presents eight theories of religion and four of those theories (the most recent four) are those of contemporary religious studies scholars.

While I have to say I don't like many of the views that are expressed in the text (Marcia Eliade and E.E.

Evans-Pritchard, particularly) or the dismissal of reductionist theories that occurs towards the end of the text, it is a real representation of what I've found in the field of religious studies.

If you're looking for a good introduction to the history and contemporary mindset of religious studies, Pals does a great job at representing the schools of thought well and presenting a good chronology of the study, as well as some notes on the way that many of these theorists are viewed by contemporary scholars. It's worth the read for students of religious studies, and it does a great job at demonstrating the relationships between theories and their critics.

While it's certainly no replacement for reading the original text (Pals' book is short, so there is a lot of summarizing going on, as is to be expected) it's definitely a good introduction or follow up, as it deals with the core ideas of the texts and many of the most prominent critiques.

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### **Faith says**

This is a really comprehensive review of eight theorists who have contributed to the anthropological (some not necessarily anthropology related) study of religion. Each chapter describes the theorists life and works and summarizes some main works that relate to the author's opinion/stance on religion. My favorite aspect about this work is Pals' critique and analysis of each theorist at the end of each chapter. He also does a really great job of comparing theorists to each other for a more holistic view on the theory of religion.

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### **Jessica Zu says**

it's probably more appropriate to name is as "historiography of the science of religion"  
Definitely a must read for anyone interested in religion, culture, and society.

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### **Meaningless says**

A critical review of all the major theories developed to understand religion in last 150 years. Quite academic but amazingly interesting.

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