
BOOK REVIEW

Chryssides, George D., and Ron Geaves. 2014. *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods*. 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury. 384pp. ISBN 978 1 78093 700 7. Hbk. £70.00. ISBN 978 1 78093 840 0. Pbk. £22.99.

Reviewed by: Dominic Corrywright, Oxford Brookes University, Harcourt Hill, Oxford, OX2 9AT.
dcorrywright@brookes.ac.uk

Keywords: fieldwork; history of scholarship; methodology; online religion; study of religion.

At the outset of this review I am happy to state, quite simply, that this is the best textbook for undergraduates studying religion on the market today. In this text George Chryssides and Ron Geaves have accomplished what no other introductory texts to the study of religions have quite achieved—a genuinely accessible, balanced and thorough introduction to “key ideas and methods.” Yet, more than that, they provide detailed case studies, brief vignettes and deeper examinations of the religions themselves. There is content on the object of study itself which informs and illustrates the methods and theories. This is invaluable to students who may have little knowledge or understanding of the details of religions. It is remarkable that the status of this text as the best introductory book on theory and method in the study of religions has continued since its first publication in 2007 (surpassing the excellent collection of essays *Approaches to the Study of Religion* edited by Peter Connolly in 1999).

The co-authors have updated and improved this second edition, specifically in three areas: first, religion online; second, in their own words, a doubly problematic concept, “the so-called insider/outsider problem”; and third, issues related to colonialism and colonial studies. These updated areas fill in lacunae from the first edition. The twelve chapters are each individually authored by Chryssides and Geaves and cover topics as diverse as “The Tools of the Trade” (chapter 1), “Phenomenology and its Critics” (chapter 6), “Authenticity and Diversity” (chapter 8) and “The Question of Truth” (chapter 11). Moreover, certain sections removed from the first edition may be found online on the Bloomsbury website alongside three brief case studies.

There are certain areas that, if a third edition became required, should be resolved or improved. The first area is consistency of format. The text boxes, sub-sections and sub-headings sometimes make reading and understanding the key topics a rather uneven experience. Some sections include directions for further reading; some don't. Those that do have varied titles and listings, for example “references” (followed by two items) (p. 27); “further reading,” three items (p. 88); “reading,” three items (p. 192); “bibliography,” four items (p. 322). The aim to include further reading links on specific aspects of study is

laudable. This is quite well accomplished in a concluding bibliography listed chapter by chapter (pp. 361-76). The chapter titled “The Internet as a Resource” includes many useful pointers and examples but it seems a bit rushed. Equally the bibliography for this chapter is rather limited, given the many excellent texts on internet resources. Perhaps a more consistent approach to FFIs (for further information), including to online resources, would achieve the objective of pointing outwards to other resources more successfully.

The second area for improvement relates to many minor errors, specifically regarding referencing and citations, for example Marguerite Keane’s *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* has no date (p. 287) and is not in the index or the bibliography. It is good to note that the cover of this second edition has Ron Geaves’s name correctly spelt—rather than the spine reference to “Greaves” from the first edition (which continues to cause citation issues for the authors and has required innumerable reference and citation corrections to student essays). Though it is perhaps ironic that Steven Sutcliffe is referred to as “Stuart” (p. 231).

A third area that needs improvement, which I noted in a review of the first edition in 2008, remains: “for such a textbook, there are gaping holes. ‘Key Figures in the Study of Religions’ for example ends with Weber and Malinowski, at the beginning of the twentieth century, while ‘Religion and Gender’ makes no mention of Carol Christ, Rita Gross or Ursula King. And those seminal shapers of the subject ... [Clifford] Geertz and [Jonathan Z.] Smith, are equally notable by their absence” (*BASR Bulletin* 113, November 2008: 22).

Nevertheless, I maintain that the second edition of *The Study of Religion: An Introduction to Key Ideas and Methods* is an excellent introductory text. The extensive use of this text in bibliographies and student essays, in my own courses, and those for which I have been an external examiner, since its first publication attests to its wide use and high value. Indeed, in my review of 2008 I hoped that repeated use would wear favoured chapters and sections, and I am most happy for this new edition to replace my worn and cared-for copy.